CORRESPONDENCE

Leo Strauss – Karl Löwith

English Translation — Review Copy, First Installment

[SOURCE PAGE 607]

1

Hotel Racine
23 rue Racine
Paris (6e)
Paris, 15 November 1932.

Dear Mr. Löwith!

I have wanted to write to you for weeks, but since I was always waiting until I should have something to write to you that concerned your interests—I mean your earthly interests—and as yet had nothing of the sort to write, I have not written until now. And even today I am really writing only to tell you that I can learn nothing here: these Anglo-Saxons have such an appearance that one scarcely dares ask them anything. So simply turn to Fehling, who will certainly receive you well, 1) as a Privatdozent, 2) as an appointed social philosopher, 3) as a friend of Steding.

Now then, Paris. I need say nothing about the city, and even if I did, I could not say it, or could say it badly. All this is very strange to me here. "Formal indications" such as "dirty," "untidy," "small town in world format" at least show you the direction of my first impression, which, however, took no account of the "present-at-hand" but only of the "ready-to-hand." An acquaintance who visited me here, who was in Paris for the first time but knew Rome, said that everything reminded him very much of Rome. Then it became clear to me that what is southern in this city is what is really strange to me and, at least for the present, incomprehensible. For you that is one inducement more.

What is sympathetic is the coincidence of the general and the private interest which one can observe here. As a result, one sees genuine patriotism here. French pacifism is an expression of this same coincidence: everyone thinks

immediately of his sons, who would have to go to war, of the French towns and villages which would be destroyed. The country has experienced the war quite differently from Germany, and for that very reason it has a less phrase-ridden relation to it. (That France can naturally much more easily be pacifist, and that there is much hypocrisy of the satiated in this pacifism, I need not tell you.) The French army has for this very reason—do not smile!—something touching about it, like a militia: these peasant boys who serve for 9–12 months in order to protect house and farm. Something of Jean-Jacques's demands has indeed been realized here.

I have seen two outstanding men, both—naturally—not philosophers: 1) the geographer André Siegfried, in his bearing somewhat reminiscent of Rudolf Otto, known as the French expert on the Anglo-Saxons, very intelligent and an excellent speaker. 2) The Arabist Massignon, a glowing soul, incredibly learned, with a strikingly great capacity for penetrating to the center of questions.

Gilson is not here: he is giving lectures in Canada. Koyré is a jolly good fellow; he is strongly under Dilthey-Groethuysen influence. I have seen Groethuysen here twice; personally very pleasant, frightfully well-read, and indeed acquainted with things which no one else knows and which are extraordinarily interesting, but, like all skeptics, particularly rich in prejudices.

Koyré is the only person with whom I associate. Through him I became acquainted with a very intelligent and very sympathetic Russian, a pupil of Jaspers (Koschevnikoff), with whom I am at least in agreement in the negations.

That reminds me—I have a German "colleague" here who would very much like to read your Heidegger criticisms. Please tell me the names, year, and issue of the journals concerned (the essays which officially deal with phenomenology and theology).

Have you heard anything from Boschwitz and about the fate of his dissertation?

What are you working on? Has your essay on the critics of religion in the 19th century appeared already? You had promised it to me; please do not forget that! Are there interesting literary novelties in Germany? I have

undertaken for the Lederer Archive a summary report on literature concerning natural law; if you have noticed anything relevant, please give me author, title, and publisher.

Farewell! I should be very glad if you would write to me sometime.

Please give my regards to your wife, and accept many greetings yourself from
your
Leo Strauss.

Your application to the Rockefeller Foundation must be submitted by January 1 at the latest. French sociology is straightforward. The most important names: Lévy-Bruhl, C. Bouglé (Sorbonne), Marcel Mauss (Collège de France); mention Massignon (Collège de France) also as a sociologist of religion, although he has nothing to do with French positivist sociology. Would you not send me your application, but in good time, so that I can make suggestions for improvement on the basis of my experience?

[SOURCE PAGE 609]

2

[Marburg], 15 November 1932.

Dear Mr. Strauss,

It is time that I heard from you, and also what you have learned concerning "sociology" in Paris. I already have a preliminary report from Groethuysen, but I should also like to have one from you!

This semester has begun for me with particular difficulties, because shortly before its beginning my father died in Munich. That is also the reason why I ask you to decipher the enclosed note; I myself cannot read Hebrew. This note comes from my father's mother, who died long ago. Can you discover its contents?

So please let me hear from you. I hope everything is going well and pleasantly in Paris!

With warm greetings,
yours,
K. Löwith

[SOURCE PAGE 610]

3

Paris, 19 November 1932.

Dear Mr. Löwith!

Since my address will change on the 1st of December, please write to me before then if there is anything more you would like to know or anything you wish to tell me.

Because of the delay in forwarding your letter sent to Kirchhain, our letters crossed one another. I am answering you only today, and only what is necessary, because I am very busy, unusually busy. It would now be too cumbersome to explain this.

The Hebrew note, in my opinion, refers to a gravestone. Perhaps to grave "No. 736, 9th section"? This could be established by an inquiry to the administration of the Jewish cemetery in Munich(?). The Hebrew letters mean, in lines 1–2, a date in Hebrew notation, and in lines 3–4, a name. I have not been able to decipher either completely; but that it is a date and a name is certain. It concerns a male ancestor of yours: Eisik (or: son of Eisik) Löwith. (Eisik is the Jewish-German form of Isaac—as far as I know, at least.) Perhaps also: Eisik Wolf Löwith. I assume that this rough information is sufficient for your purpose. Do inquire, to make sure that it is a grave, in Munich!

Do you have any more specific questions concerning "French sociology"? Send them to me!

Farewell!
With warm greetings to you and your wife,
your
Leo Strauss.

[SOURCE PAGE 611]

4

21 November 1932.

Dear Mr. Strauss, you "unusually very busy" Parisian!

Many thanks for your two letters—which I have not yet completely, but nevertheless half deciphered—a typewriter at Rockefeller expense, my wife thought, would be desirable for the benefit of your fellow men, but I—with my handwriting—can unfortunately do nothing there.

How is it with moving about in the foreign language? Is it still painful deliberation and searching for the right words and sentences, or already bold, audacious speaking? And how does one live and eat in such "hotels"? Who is Massignon, of whom you wrote?

I am very much occupied with my college work, because during the vacation I scarcely got to it, owing to my father's death and everything that had to be done there. I am giving an entirely new course, entitled "Introduction"; it deals with nothing other than being-in-the-world and intends to show how little the secularization has succeeded and how ambiguous this secularized relation of modern men to the "world" is. Concretely I want to show it 1) by criticism of Heidegger and Jaspers and 2) positively in the continuation of my habilitation thesis and especially in the intrahuman significance of work and—money. I have great respect, after all, for Simmel's "Philosophy of Money," however much he remains stuck in mere dialectic.

Do you happen to know R. Eucken's "World and Man" (1918)—mildly popular, to be sure, but not bad in its fundamental idea and in some respects even clearer than Dilthey. To earn money I am then also giving a one-hour course, "Basic Concepts of Psychoanalysis": being human and being a sexual being. Kant's ethics lectures are for this—for bourgeois Christian sexual morality—extremely instructive and—witty.

My three phenomenology essays have appeared in Theologische Rundschau (Mohr, Tübingen), 1930, issues 1 and 5, and Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche (Mohr, Tübingen), 1930, issue 5. The critique of religion in the 19th

century, as well as an essay on the philosophy of existence, has not yet appeared—it will probably come in January.

As regards my application, I should like to ask you for the following further information: Who is Professor Kehr (on the committee), and how might one perhaps get in touch with him? And would you know a way to "recommend" me to Mendelssohn-B.? Fehling sent me the regulations a few days ago. The most difficult thing for me still is the work plan—how am I to produce only 3–4 typed pages which will reasonably "justify" my having to go to Paris or Rome? Furthermore: is it permissible to say from the outset that, for example, one would like to go to Paris the first year and to Rome the second for this and that? As soon as I have drafted the application I should like to send it to you for your appraisal, but for that you must give me your new address from December 1 onward!

I was unfortunately unable to place one of my Jaspers reviews (Göschen) with the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik—it was not "sociological" enough for them—in reality, however, I believe they do not dare approach Jaspers at all in Heidelberg—out of cowardice and academic "tact." Do you know of a journal to which I might offer it?

I know of no interesting literary novelties here; indeed it is altogether doubtful to me whether the novelties are still literary in this time when the newest "science"—here in Marburg too—is "military science" and the new lectureships concern "work creation," "settlement policy," "war science," etc., and the old professors once again have a legitimate heart and soul with the gentlemen of the Corps.

Many thanks also for deciphering the Hebrew note.

My wife also sends you her warmest greetings.

Farewell in Paris, and may you acquire still more taste or sense for the South and for the human mobility of all southerners. A thing like a German philosophical faculty meeting is, I believe, impossible there, or at most possible as a kind of joke.

Warm greetings
from your
K. Löwith

[SOURCE PAGE 612]

5

New address: 7 Square Grange, 22 rue de la Glacière, Paris (13e)
30 December 1932.

Dear Mr. Löwith!

Only today do I get around to expressing my heartfelt thanks for the sending of your two essays. I have been very busy in recent weeks, and I am still so, but I have at least found the time to read your essays and to reflect upon their content.

"Nietzsche and Kierkegaard" naturally interests me more than the essay devoted chiefly to Jaspers. I can all the more readily restrict myself to that one, since the fundamental assertion of the two essays is identical.

Your thesis was generally known to me—from some conversations in Marburg. Nevertheless, I was surprised by the decisiveness with which you raise the question of the nature of man, of the universal-human. The question, as you formulate it right at the beginning: "What is man, and what has become of him?" suggests that "what man is" is meant as a general, eternal standard for "what has become of him," what he has made of himself by virtue of his freedom. This supposition is contradicted by the further exposition, in which precisely the mutability of human nature is asserted. What then do you mean by the question of the nature of man? You understand "nature" in opposition to unnaturalness, i.e. to the unnaturalness of Christianity. That is: you too understand this concept—no differently from Nietzsche—only "polemically and reactively" (63). Now you certainly go beyond N. by also taking into view what is meant by "existence," and thus the question of the nature of man becomes for you the question of the one human essence in which both "life" and "existence" lie. Thus you broaden the polemic, but you do not arrive at an unpolemical, "integral" question.

I believe that this is unavoidable so long as one also takes one's orientation from the highest stage of the 19th century. You yourself remark (48) that it is always a matter there of rehabilitations: one wants to repeat something lost, to dig out something buried. But what has been lost is sought again, is desired from the standpoint of the present-real—it is therefore what was

denied by Hegel, and generally by modern philosophy, affirmed as it was understood in this negation: the original dimension is not reached at all. If the philosophy of the 19th century is through and through polemical and therefore unradical, then by taking one's orientation from the philosophy of the 19th century one cannot reach the radical question at all.

You are concerned with impartiality, with an impartial knowledge of man, with the ideal of the impartial man. The fact that you are concerned with impartiality proves that we are not impartial and therefore cannot ask impartially either. But we could not be concerned with impartiality if we did not "somehow" know of impartiality. What is to be done? It seems to me that we must follow the weak glimmer which the word "impartiality" gives us, follow it unconditionally; we must take the suspicion against our partiality quite seriously. The partiality we mean is partiality in the Christian tradition and in the polemic against this tradition. But we can emerge from this circle of polemic and polemic against polemic only guided by the positive, concrete intuition of nature, which is not itself again interpreted polemically. Only pre-Christian, i.e. Greek philosophy, satisfies this desideratum.

Greek philosophy cannot fulfill this function, however; a true humanism cannot come about so long as historicism can raise the objection: a different age requires a different ideal—therefore the ideal of the Greeks cannot be our ideal. Now I find that by virtue of your "naturalistic" intention, directed toward impartiality, you are led to the boundary of historicism, without actually crossing this boundary. You want to get back behind the dualism of "being" and "meaning"; you seek the being which is not by virtue of "interpretation." But if you concede that the universal-human, human nature, is rightly understood differently in different ages, that therefore "the eternal basic text" is rightly interpreted differently in each case, then by that very fact you concede the necessity of "interpretation."

I do not know whether these all-too-preliminary remarks are intelligible to you. I shall therefore express my criticism quite generally as follows: I find in you all the elements of a humanism, of a human philosophy of man; but these elements do not come together—and they do not do so because you orient yourself too much to the heirs of our anti-humanistic tradition and consequently do not emerge from the spell of this tradition.

Is it accidental that all humanism which has existed understood itself as a return to the Greeks? And why do you believe that you can escape this necessity?

I must conclude. Let me hear from you soon, also about how things are going with you in general and with regard to Rockefeller in particular.

With warm greetings to your wife and to you yourself,
yours,
Leo Strauss

CORRESPONDENCE
Leo Strauss – Karl Löwith

English Translation — Letters 12–40

[SOURCE PAGE 20]

12

28 May 1933

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Many thanks for your letter and for your efforts with Koyré and Groethuysen. I have meanwhile also written to Groethuysen at his Paris address and received a reply yesterday, which I enclose. I do not know whether G.'s proposal can be carried out; I may leave the matter to you to discuss with Koyré. Please recommend me to him and excuse me to him for these complications. But I should really very much like the Paris committee to decide in my favor, and the way Berlin withdrew from the affair, or rather made an affair of it, is quite fatal. I believe Fehling arranged it that way because he thought my previous work insufficiently social-scientific for Americans and really belonging to the humanities (where, however, there are no scholarships), so that he presented it to me as a special favor that he had accepted my application for it at all. It is possible, however, that Schumacher had a competing candidate of his own. Fortunately, a few days ago I received a very flattering review of Weber and Marx in an American journal, a copy of which I enclose. Perhaps something can be made of it. In addition, through the local lecturer (Schmidt-Paris) I had Baruzi written to, asking

whether he might be able to influence the decision, or the gentleman concerned at the Paris Foundation. I thank you very much for your recommendation to Mr. Van Sickle!

I was very glad to hear that you are nevertheless getting the second year! During that time you will hopefully find a professional opportunity which will relieve your next financial worries. But that is very, very difficult today in every country. For my part, I have so far made private inquiries of several German professors at Swiss universities and received everywhere the same completely negative answer. Switzerland is already closing itself against new habilitations and re-habilitations; there is no question of lectureships, and anti-Semitism is growing there too. I thought of Switzerland first of all because being able to speak and write German is decisive for me as well. In philosophy especially it is impossible to use a foreign language.

What you say about our eternal emigrant existence is only partly intelligible to me. Klein is exemplary in this respect, but by origin and way of life an exception. In a certain sense he is everywhere and nowhere at home; with me it is different, and although I am not "rooted" in the national sense, I nevertheless feel myself so strongly to belong to Germany that being an emigrant would feel like uprooting.* This does not exclude the possibility that "we men of science" transcend the "present-at-hand" and have no *locum manentem*, but inquire.

But as for your distinction between Right and Left, I am astonished that you can take it over from politics so dogmatically. There is much to be said against the right-wing "principles" if in fact they do not tolerate the spirit of science and of German Jewry—although you know that I by no means represent the "liberal" and human-rights "freedom of the spirit." Besides, Fascism is quite a democratic growth. Why be so "cultured" and immediately turn the nearest things into world-historical perspectives, and build yourself upon Caesar and Rome, when Christianity thoroughly disintegrated that Roman spirit, and George's Third Reich is not the same as that of Moeller van den Bruck, and the latter is itself heaven-wide different from that of the "wildly excited petty bourgeois," as Goebbels has called them! What has happened so far is not a "revolution," but a radical reorganization, and the so-called "idea" of this petty-bourgeois upheaval is exclusively the völkisch-

nationalist one, with the *novum* of "race," an idea for which one has to thank a Frenchman and an Englishman—Gobineau and Chamberlain! But the Germans have always been incapable of looking at world history "really," i.e. realistically; they always practice a metaphysics of history, and therefore there is so much humbug in it: what Hegel did on the grand scale every professor and Privatdozent now does on the small scale, and thus the world-historical perspective becomes wonderfully entangled with the narrowest personal interests.

As for crawling to the cross, I too have no intention of doing so in any form; but conversely, the world of the present is not such as to produce martyrs—it produces only joiners and those who stand aside.

What do you make of all this? *Dixi et animam meam salvavi!*

Warm regards,
Yours,
K. Löwith

* Just now one finds oneself between two stools. Abroad, in a serious case, people like us are nevertheless Germans; here, Jews. Even Switzerland no longer wants to be the traditional land of asylum.

[SOURCE PAGE 22]

13

10 June 1933

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Did you receive my letter with a copy of a review of my Weber essay and with Groethuysen's reply to me? I sent it to you about ten days ago. It would be foolish if it had been lost, since it concerned the scholarship matter, which must presumably be decided in these days. Groethuysen wrote that he himself had no connections with the Paris committee, but that Koyré, through Lévy-Bruhl, might perhaps be able to do something? The copy of the very favorable American review was intended for the same purpose. It appeared in *The Annals* (The American Academy of Political and Social Science), vol. 167, May 1933, p. 244.

Have you seen Heidegger's Rector's Address? Very interesting—but for the time being it appeared only in excerpts in the ⋆Freiburger Zeitung⋆.

As for human rights, they may indeed have become ridiculous—but they are not ridiculous, and I am at present studying Rousseau and find the development of his contradictions between ⋆homme–bourgeois⋆ and ⋆citoyen⋆ more honest and instructive than all the later dogmatic theories of the state put together. Incidentally, a German translation of Donoso Cortés's ⋆Gottesstaat⋆ has now appeared for the first time, Badenia Verlag, Karlsruhe (5 Marks).

Please write and tell me how matters stand!
Warm regards,
Yours,
K. Löwith

P.S. Boschwitz is here and continues to please me very much.

[SOURCE PAGE 23]

14

22 June 1933 — Postcard

Caro mio,

That is indeed very good news, and I thank you warmly for your friendly and vigorous support with Dr. K. I also think it very kind of Dr. F. that he referred K. to you for information about me. Frankly, I had not expected that of him. K.'s question about my state of health arises from the fact that the local district physician wrote in the certificate that I have only one functioning lung left, as a result of the injury, and am "not equal to physical exertions," though suitable for a study residence in Italy. I did tell him that I ski, etc.—but his anxious conscience insisted, although it is factually nonsense, since I am not going to Siberia or the Equator.

Unfortunately Krautheimer has not yet given me your Hobbes essay. You will receive the Rector's Address as soon as I have it back; at present I have lent it out. It will also appear in print. My essay will not appear until next week. And I have no offprints yet of the one on the philosophical criticism of religion in the nineteenth century, in the ⋆Theologische Rundschau⋆,

because only the first part has appeared and the second will be in the next issue, i.e. in two months, and I asked the publisher to bind the two parts together for me.

Klein is here and is collecting testimonials; he remains as lively and charming as ever. But in general the possibilities of contact with the younger colleagues are gradually shrinking—basically everyone has his own very personal egoistic interests occupying him completely. Your French seems to me excellent.

Warm regards to you and your wife,
Yours,
K. Löwith

[SOURCE PAGE 23]

15

12 July 1933 — Postcard

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Lecturer Schmidt told me yesterday that Baruzi had written to Koyré on my behalf, since he himself had no connections. I hope K. did not find this fatal and did not undertake anything further, since he already knew from you that it was no longer so necessary once I had the review.

Unfortunately I still have no decision; I do not know whether this is a bad sign. On 20 June Fehling had already sent me a copy of an inquiry from the Foundation, and I immediately forwarded my answer. The question was that my topic seemed insufficiently "empirical" to the Americans; on Fehling's advice I therefore made some concessions.

Have you found André Gide's address for forwarding the "Kierkegaard–Nietzsche"? I have not yet got around to reading your Hobbes review. A Catholic chaplain, Dr. Becker, who took his doctorate under C. Schmitt on Hobbes in 1925 (unpublished dissertation) and is now here, attending my lecture and seminar on Hegel, is interested in your work, especially since he was the Hobbes reviewer in the ⋆Deutsche Literatur-Zeitung⋆ before you and remains in contact with Schmitt. He also knows the author of the Hobbes book which you recently reviewed and has a similar opinion of him.

Dr. Becker is a very cultivated, intelligent Catholic, and I could imagine that you might gain something from contact with him.

As for my future, everything is still very uncertain, although outwardly nothing has changed here for the time being and I have not yet lost my lectureship.

Warm regards,
Yours,
K. Löwith

P.S. Could you send me a catalogue or list of cheap editions of de Maistre's principal writings? Is Jean Wahl's essay on Hegel worth reading? Will you be in Paris in August and September?

[SOURCE PAGE 24]

16

Undated

Dear Mr. Löwith,

We agree about the general character of our situation: our situation is characterized by an in principle limitless anarchy; there is no longer any generally binding norm at all (the sentence has become possible: "I don't want to be a human being at all"—Brecht, ⋆Mahagonny⋆). And the question is: can this anarchy be overcome, and how is it to be overcome?

1) Kierkegaard's answer. K. radicalizes dissolution into absolute isolation, i.e. into the constitution of a wholly apolitical existence, thereby clearing the way for the old, eternal answer of Christianity.

Against this you say, in substance: a) Granted, though not conceded, that it makes sense to speak of an eternal answer; in any case an eternal answer fits only an eternal question. But K.'s question is not an eternal question at all, but only the question of modern bourgeois man (cf. pp. 8–10). b) Hence K.'s answer is in truth not an eternal answer either, but an entirely worldly, temporal one: in order to obtain the eternal answer, K. must paradoxically give the problem of his time an eternal significance (the problem of the nineteenth century is "just also" the problem of Christianity) ...; but since

K.'s problem is worldly, political, it is no wonder that he finally gives a political answer, namely an authoritarian-reactionary one (cf. pp. 12–13).

Against your criticism I would object: the "just also" (p. 12) is not self-betraying, the political cloven hoof of an allegedly apolitical devil (forgive or improve the unfortunate analogy). Rather: the eternal Christian answer must acquire an unusual evidence "today," because today we stand at the end of an epoch in which an answer diametrically hostile to Christianity was attempted, and because today we can grasp the failure of this attempt with our hands. The dissolution from which K. begins is the consequence of the attempt to find an absolute solution to the problem of order by human means—the consequence of this attempt is the radical "publication" of man and thereby the loss of all human substance, or the danger of this loss. K. does not fundamentally assert that the human problem is not a political problem, i.e. a problem of living together and of its order and government, but that the human-political problem cannot be solved politically.*

2) Nietzsche's answer. Whereas K., from the insight "Nihilism is the consequence of the attempt to solve the Christian problem atheistically, humanly," concludes: therefore the Christian answer must be restored, Nietzsche concludes: therefore nihilism is a consequence of the Christian problem itself, therefore this problem itself must be negated → affirmation of the meaninglessness of pure existence, a neutral Yes to the whole of beings, freedom from meaning altogether.

In this overcoming of nihilism, which you too have in mind, and which I openly confess I do not understand, N. did not hold out: he missed it through his doctrine of eternal recurrence and the will to power.

Against this I would say: a) In the doctrine of eternal recurrence N. frees himself from the Jewish-Christian expectation of a *providentia particularis*; thus he discovers not the indifference of all beings (there can hardly be talk of a neutral Yes to the whole of beings when he speaks of "truer sides of existence"—cf. p. 24), but the indifference of all beings, of the whole of the world, toward man. That is: he regains the standpoint of ancient, pre-Christian philosophy. The ambiguous thing in N.'s doctrine of recurrence is not the attempt to return man to the naturalness of nature, but the enormous pathos which he needs in order to gain entrance for the truth calmly and

without tension stated by the Greeks; by this—and only by this—he does indeed betray how strongly, negatively, he is bound by the Christian expectation of a ⋆providentia particularis⋆.

b) In general: N.'s overcoming of nihilism is not so much the conquest of an essentially new possibility as the recovery of a possibility denied by Christianity; N. seeks the natural man as the pre-Christian man.

[SOURCE PAGE 26]

I repeat: the denial of meaning is the denial of ⋆providentia particularis⋆ in every form (including that of belief in progress), not the neutral Yes to everything that is.

Dear Mr. Löwith! Please take the foregoing notes with indulgence. Unfortunately I did not have time to work them out more fully, especially those concerning Nietzsche. But since you know me, you will easily be able to supply what is missing.

In any event, I thank you warmly for your fine essay, so tasteful also in its external form. I have forwarded the copy intended for Gide. When shall I receive your essay on the criticism of religion?

Do you still have no news about the scholarship? I know positively that the official meeting took place at the end of last month. I myself received confirmation of the second year a week ago.

I shall remain in Paris at least until 1 October, and at the latest I shall go to England on 1 March.

Werner Becker is well known to me through Carl Schmitt's laudatory remarks about him. I have read his Hobbes article in the ⋆Görres-Lexikon⋆—the article is very good, but I find that Becker remains far too much—much more than Schmitt, for example—under the spell of the prevailing interpretation, i.e. one that explains Hobbes's naturalism immanently, instead of trying to clarify the human genesis of this naturalism. Unfortunately I have no time at present to write to Becker. But please tell him that I would be very grateful if he would communicate to me his objections to the thesis I sketched in my review of Lubienski.

Have you got your copy of Heidegger's Rector's Address back? Could you lend it to me for three days? Incidentally, I have heard that the second part of ⋆Being and Time⋆ is now appearing, and that its strangest innovation is the return from Plato and Aristotle to the Presocratics (in a way fundamentally related to Nietzsche). Is that true?

Farewell! Write soon, and tell me especially whether and how you have heard from Rockefeller.
Warmly greeting you and your wife,
Leo Strauss

⋆ See here Schiller's analogous criticism of Rousseau in ⋆Aesthetic Education⋆.

[SOURCE PAGE 28]

17

20 July 1933 — Postcard

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Many thanks for your letter, to which I shall reply at greater length shortly. Today only the very welcome news that I have received the scholarship for one year in Italy! This is, in its "origin," your doing—for without you I should hardly have embarked on the undertaking. Please also thank Koyré for his efforts in this regard! I have already ordered Heidegger's Rector's Address for you; it will appear these days as a booklet. (The other was only an excerpt.) Do you know Jean Wahl's book on the "Unhappy Consciousness" in Hegel? Is it worth reading? And if Sorel's ⋆Illusions du progrès⋆ and the short biography of Sorel by Pirou, if the latter contains a picture of Sorel (both published by Marcel Rivière, Paris), are both easily obtainable, could you get them for me? Reimbursement of the cost either in money or in a book, if you need something German.

Furthermore, some practically important questions: how does the Foundation handle payment of the scholarship now that the dollar has been devalued? Does one consequently receive that much less when exchanging it? Is it 130 or 150 dollars? Can one get by comfortably or with difficulty on it in Paris? And concerning a possible second year: is it really necessary, in accordance

with the submitted plan, to produce from time to time scholarly fragments during the first year, or to submit something in writing toward the end, in order to have a prospect of a second? Or did you merely assure them by letter that you had done what you had done? For certain reasons I am counting only on one year and might then, between ourselves, give up such demonstrable work in order to work well for my own purposes!?

Warm regards from your
Karl Löwith
Excuse my handwriting today.

[SOURCE PAGE 29]

18

2 August 1933 — Postcard

Dear Mr. Strauss,

Many thanks for your letter. I have been in Munich for several days; the two Sorel books will therefore probably be waiting for me in Marburg. Then I shall also settle my debts!

Meanwhile, consultation with the curator and correspondence with Heidegger have resulted in my deciding—unfortunately!—to begin the scholarship only after the winter semester, because too many important changes will take place at the university in the autumn and winter, and it would be unwise if I were not present and teaching then—for, under certain circumstances, my whole further future at the university depends upon it. I have not yet communicated this to Fehling, etc. (so please do not tell anyone else!)—I shall do so only in a few weeks, and if possible personally in Berlin. I hope the Rockefeller Foundation will permit me this postponement. Do you not think so too? This case is actually provided for in the additional "supplements" to the Rockefeller rules, although as a somewhat undesirable exceptional case.

I find your judgment of Heidegger's address unjust, and your judgment of Ebbinghaus's address far too generous. In Heidegger's artful language I cannot detect any "decline" [?] of style, but only the same misleading verbal artistry already present in *What Is Metaphysics?*—not sympathetic to me, but

nevertheless highly considered and indeed "artful." Nor can I detect any "cowering"; rather—as always—refined ambiguity (ontic-ontological), such as was also contained, on a larger and more genuine scale, for example, in Hegel's Prussian-ontological philosophy of the state.

That Heidegger binds the beginning of philosophy to the all-too-present end of contemporary history has always been in the direction of his conception of history. What I find mistaken is something you share with him: the pseudo-theology of the "origin," which is to be recovered: a secularized Fall, transformed into a belief in "destiny." And from this comes the whole ambiguity of his appeal to beginning and origin, as justification of the end and of the present "moment." In general, everything and everyone today thinks "world-historically," far from the "nearest" things and people.

Have you seen, for example, G. Benn's book *The Intellectuals and the State*? Or K. Hildebrandt's new book on Plato? In Heidegger especially, the disbelief in philosophy has always turned into theoretical activism: spirit = historical resoluteness = Kierkegaard's "existing" thought = Marx's making-theory-practical—because Hegel was the last person who still believed in philosophy as such!

Warm regards,
Yours,
K. Löwith

[SOURCE PAGE 30]

19

Paris, 5 September 1933

Dear Mr. Löwith!

First of all my warmest thanks for the second copy of Heidegger's address and for Barth's *Theological Existence Today!* Barth pleased me much more than H. It will be a long time before atheism becomes "competitive" with Christianity. Compare only B.'s open personal confession of revelation with H.'s confession of atheism behind Nietzsche's back, and Barth's Christian criticism of what is happening with H.'s uncritical submission. I therefore repeat my initial judgment of H.

A very credible man—incidentally—has told me that the Marburg philosophers, Krüger in particular, consider their personal relations with people of our kind broken off. Since I recently wrote to Krüger in the belief that such a thing was impossible, it would be important for me to know how the matter stands. Could you say a word to me about it? It goes without saying that I would make no use of your information.

Meanwhile I have also received your essay on the criticism of religion in the nineteenth century. Many thanks! Koyré, to whom I showed the essay, asks you most cordially to send him offprints of your essays—especially the one in which you presented the inner development of phenomenology—and he is happy in turn to reciprocate. I strongly advise you to fulfill this request; it can only be useful to you if Koyré comes to know you more closely.

If I may say a few words about your essay: your fundamental claim, that recognition of Hegelian philosophy makes the further step to atheism and finally to the "overcoming of atheism" unavoidable, seems entirely convincing to me; and if Hegel is otherwise the completion of what Descartes began and Kant carried out decisively, then it is clear that theism is not only incompatible with "all the facts of the modern, this-worldly human world"—it is, as the Law and the Prophets and the New Testament show, by its own meaning incompatible with all the facts of actual human life at all times—but also incompatible with the fundamental convictions and ideal of life of the whole of modernity (as you say most sharply on p. 219, paragraph 2). Unfortunately, however, precisely then the question arises as to the right of modernity itself. And for this, as it seems to me, more radical question, the analysis of the path from Hegel to Nietzsche supplies nothing, at least not by itself.

I entirely agree with your result, though not as a result: let us really begin on this side of the alternative atheism–theism, let us begin completely from the beginning and originally, and let us see whether our efforts produce something "never before seen," or something very ancient, or perhaps even something which has meanwhile already existed. At least, it seems to me, a skeptic—that is, a critical person who has time—must speak in this way.

Your own position emerges most clearly in your remarks on Overbeck and Stirner. This combination, which forces itself upon me, is indeed very

remarkable. Has Overbeck ever expressed himself about Stirner? And as for Stirner otherwise, you have now given an answer to the question of how, after surrendering the universally human, the idea of "man" can still be distinguished at all; but—quite apart from the fact that this answer nevertheless implies a general "ethics," albeit a formal one (truly human is whoever "has become equal to himself")—this answer again remains exposed to the unavoidable question which you raise against Kierkegaard on p. 205, and which is not merely not removed by Nietzsche's questioning of truth as such (pp. 206f.), but posed in its sharpest form: for there is no answer to the question of How—whether it be called "freedom" or "passionateness" or "strength" or "resoluteness" or "authenticity" or even "wakefulness"—that is not at the same time the answer to the question of What.

Let me hear from you again, and be warmly greeted by your
Leo Strauss.

[SOURCE PAGE 32]

20

9 September 1933 — Postcard

Dear Mr. Strauss,

As for the rumor concerning the Marburg philosophers, I can only assure you that it is in no respect true, naturally including Krüger. Nevertheless, I am still convinced that "in itself" there is a kind of historical rupture, because there are now two camps—quite apart from private individuals.

Heidegger has a call to Berlin! Please give me Koyré's address and title—clearly written, though! I shall gladly send him some offprints and try to obtain the missing ones he wants (*Theologische Rundschau*) from the publisher. I am currently sold out through the twofold dispatch to Fehling.

More soon, warm regards and thanks for the letter,
Yours,
Karl Löwith

Do you know anything about the "Mediterranean University" in Nice, under Valéry's direction? Would that be a possibility for us?

[SOURCE PAGE 32]

21

October 1933

Dear Löwith!

Warmest congratulations first! Then the question: is it something permanent, i.e. secured for longer than two years? If not, I would strongly advise against accepting it. For, by all human reckoning, you are secured through the Rockefeller scholarship for two full years—and now under good financial conditions again (you can have your scholarship converted into Italian currency!)—and finally and above all in *bel paese*, rather than in that distant barbarous country where you would be completely out of the world. And you do not know what may emerge for you in Italy during two years. But if in K. it is for a longer time (more than two years), or in principle permanent, then naturally accept it!

Now, as to the competition with the scholarship which is unavoidable in this case: your involuntary departure from the German university career—which is not a departure from the German state community—is certainly without influence on your entitlement to the scholarship. Technically, however, it is difficult, since you would need a change in the duration of the scholarship. I shall try to approach Mr. Kittredge about this. But I need your authorization, which I would have to have before the 30th of this month, since I shall return to the office on that day! It is not without danger, since you will then be committed.

If I were in your place I would do this: write to the Paris headquarters that you had received an invitation to give lectures in Constantinople, beginning 1 January and ending 1 May or June, and ask for a further postponement of the beginning of your scholarship until then. If you achieve this, ask Constantinople for a year's unpaid leave from the Turkish institution.

I am in great haste! I have meanwhile paid the books at Ebel. Gilson's commentary on the *Discours de la méthode* costs 50 francs (= about 8.50 RM); there is also a smaller one by Gilson: 10 francs (= about 1.60 RM). The *Index scholastico-cartesien* is out of print.
Warmly,
Your Strauss

[SOURCE PAGE 34]

22

6 December 1933 — Postcard

Dear Strauss,

Many thanks for your letter. The second year in Paris was explicitly refused me at the time because another applicant had a very similar and better plan for it. I would therefore at most have to try later to obtain an extension for Rome and the Italian work. But there is still plenty of time for that, though little prospect.

Meanwhile I also received from Paris the inquiry about conversion of the scholarship, which I naturally answered affirmatively, since one cannot engage in speculation on dollars. Dr. Becker, whom I spoke to today, considers it impossible that Schmitt—despite his principled anti-Semitism—has not replied to you for that reason (Heidegger, incidentally, never replied to my question as to what Achelis had told him!), but 1) he has an enormous amount to do as "State Councillor," and 2) Becker says he too knows no English Hobbes scholars to whom one could recommend you. Becker knows none either; he says there are only two ancient Hobbes epigones and one quite insignificant younger one; he met them briefly at an English congress, but there is certainly nothing to be gained there for you.

As for finding a home for your Hobbes critique of religion, it is very probably possible in a German journal, but in my view—and Becker's—the best thing would be to approach the old Tönnies, now dismissed. If you write to him, however, be sure to type the letter. I can obtain his address for you. Otherwise the ⋆Kantstudien⋆ might be considered, where Liebert resigned and Meyer in Halle edits the matter. Gadamer knows him, and also Dr. Kuhn; that will certainly suffice. If both attempts fail, Becker could also recommend you to a Catholic journal. Furthermore, the ⋆Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung⋆, now appearing in German in Paris at Alcan, edited by Prof. Max Horkheimer in Geneva (formerly Frankfurt), might be considered; you could refer to me there.

That is all that occurs to me at the moment.
Warm regards,

Yours,
Karl Löwith

P.S. For Hobbes, *Logos* might also be suitable, and you could best have the manuscript sent to Kroner through Krüger.

In the seminar this time I am treating Schmitt's *Concept of the Political*—the more precisely I read it, the more devoid of content it seems to me. Nothing comes of it beyond anti-liberalism and, positively, an "existential" dogmatism; no justification of the friend-enemy distinction emerges anywhere, and the friend-enemy relation does not ground the possibility of the political emergency; conversely, the latter first constitutes it. Interesting and suspicious are the alterations in the three different editions of 1927, 1932, and 1933! Do you know by name Prof. Henri Jourdon (Berlin)? He wants to help me. Is he regarded as influential in Paris?

[SOURCE PAGE 35]

23

Rome, 14 December 1934

Dear Strauss,

I followed your friendly advice to inquire of Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, with the result that he himself urgently advises me to contact Kittredge directly because with the present Berlin committee it is hopeless—although, incidentally, he himself has remained on the committee at the request of the Rockefeller Foundation. I now await what they will write to me from Paris.

How are you? Will you be able to establish yourself in England, or are you thinking of Palestine? I cannot understand at all why you are having difficulties finding a publisher for your Hobbes—it ought surely to interest England seriously! I very much hope that this question will still be resolved for you. I have been waiting month after month since June for the publisher's assurance concerning my Nietzsche.

Enclosed is a short newspaper article which the editors, however, cut and altered in the most ridiculous fashion at almost all the important points. One request: could you find out for me, as soon as possible, the present address of the historian E. Kantorowicz (Frederick Hohenstaufen)? He is supposedly in

Cambridge (or Oxford?). I know the Italian who translated his Frederick, and he wants to shorten it before publication and needs K.'s consent, but cannot obtain his address from Germany. Do you also know where the former Berlin ancient historian Artur Rosenberg (*History of Bolshevism*) is?

I shall probably be able to place my Schmitt criticism in an international journal of legal philosophy in Geneva. It is a pity that no one has the inclination and time for letter-writing but sits on the "sandbank of temporality" (as Hegel calls "worries").
Warm regards,
Yours,
K. Löwith

[SOURCE PAGE 36]

24

Rome, 23 November 1935

Dear Strauss,

At last I learned through Klein your new address and your latest fortunes. I was very glad to hear from Klein that you are secured for another year through Cambridge and Rockefeller and can continue your Hobbes. Now please let me hear from you yourself again!

The world of relationships and experiences grows wider and richer through life abroad, but the original world of old relationships and connections becomes narrower and thinner the longer one is away from Germany and from one another, and it would be a pity if the distance could not at least be overcome through written exchange. So I shall simply begin by telling you something about myself here.

You know that Rome is beautiful for living and that I love the South; but you probably do not know how little the intellectual and political life here corresponds to the ancient Roman tradition and modern imperial claims and grand speeches, and what hardened old skeptics and "indifferentists" the Italians are—there would be much interesting to say about this, but letters are not suited to it! Naturally one does not lack acquaintances here; besides the emigrants, we know quite a number of Italians. I believe I have already

written to you about Gentile, for example. Most are strongly interested in politics; philosophically there is nothing—absolutely nothing.

The former Protestant theologian and convert Peterson lives here; Wolfskehl was here for a long time. Essentially one is entirely dependent on oneself in one's work—especially since my work is directed toward very German subjects. My Nietzsche book, which I had finished back in June, has finally, after many failures, found a German publisher (*Die Runde*), and I am just reading the first proofs. A treatise that is already more than a year old and was originally intended for the *Kantstudien* ("Hegel–Marx–Kierkegaard") is now being printed in French in Koyré's *Recherches Philosophiques*; a criticism of Schmitt, signed under a pseudonym, in the Geneva *Internationale Zeitschrift für Theorie des Rechts*—I shall send you an offprint as soon as I have it. *Ecce tutto!*

Until recently I was still counting on resuming my lectures in Marburg. Kittredge and Fehling did not want to extend my scholarship because a longer absence from Marburg was "against my own best interests," and Kittredge had himself asked the dean in Marburg and received the answer that I was to return after the leave. The same dean who gave this information to Paris, however, has, as the curator informed me last week, done the opposite internally and, to prevent my return, 1) refused continuation of the Privatdozent scholarship and 2) petitioned the minister to withdraw my lectureship! Thus the chapter "Marburg," and in that respect Germany or the German university, is unfortunately closed for me.

Unfortunately—for despite everything it would have made considerably more sense for me to hold my ground there as best I could than, as I am now forced to do, to seek foreign possibilities. And from all my previous experience, unfortunately, unfortunately, almost only the U.S.A. is in question (where Tillich intends to make efforts for me)—no European country, least of all Italy, where I would most like to remain. Besides, the prospects for a Privatdozent of philosophy are equally miserable everywhere.

For the moment there is only one way out: after the decision in Marburg has fallen, to try after all to obtain another Rockefeller year. I hope Kittredge is inclined to this and can do something for me independently of the German committee—for I can no longer count on that. Perhaps for this reason I shall

go to Paris. If you can give me advice for this, please do so! Does Kittredge also speak or understand German? My English is miserable for lack of practice, and he probably does not understand Italian.

[SOURCE PAGE 38]

Mendelssohn-Bartholdy is a certain help to me in all these undertakings and in the 99% useless letters; fortunately I once got his address from you. He knows all the people at the Council and in Paris and seems to be making a real effort, in a very friendly way, to obtain another fellowship for me. For the moment, however, we are not in acute need, because I was able to save enough from the Rockefeller scholarship to exist here for some time longer.

At the Italian Institute for German Studies there are often interesting lectures—Heidegger, Schmitt, and Heyse are coming here soon! Are you still following German affairs, or have you become so at home in England that you already feel far removed from them? Here I often experience the opposite: I increasingly feel how much one is intellectually at home in Germany and not in the Latin culture as it is still best represented here by Croce. It is infinitely difficult—even with Italians who are very well versed in German literature—to find a common basis for exchange.

By all this I of course do not mean that I have "homesickness," still less longing for Germany! Not at all! For even a Jew as "assimilated" as I am cannot fail to recognize the break and the gravity of the German Jewish problem, but neither do I sympathize with the hopelessly embittered emigrants, whose number here is, incidentally, very small. Most do not understand what is and is not happening in Germany because they think in old-fashioned, moral categories instead of historical-philosophical ones. They cannot free themselves from the past they have suffered because they suffer from the hereditary evil of German university people and have crazy ideas about "science," "eternal values," "culture," "history," etc. Thus one lives, fundamentally, rather isolated.

But Rome and the South greatly assist me in maintaining philosophical equanimity—one would only need much more of it within oneself and, instead of two suitcases, possess a Diogenes' tub.

How are you, your wife, and the child? And who are there among the Germans in Cambridge whom you know and esteem? Is Cambridge pleasant to live in? I have no conception of it. Do you know W. Brack?

Let me hear from you soon and be warmly greeted by your
Karl Löwith

P.S. If you write by typewriter, a typed letter is preferred!! See my handwriting! NB. What philosophical things, etc., have you encountered in the last year that might also be important for my interests?

[SOURCE PAGE 39]

25

15 April 1935

Dear Strauss,

Many thanks for your ⋆Philosophy of the Law⋆! It arrived just on the days when Boschwitz was here, passing through on his way to Palestine. Actually I am a very unsuitable addressee for your book, because I know so little of Maimonides and of the whole of medieval Jewish philosophy—and besides, because through my upbringing I grew up from the outset so un-Jewishly that I can understand it only with detours and difficulty, and cannot really understand how one can be as rational and ethical as, fundamentally, all the Jews I know, even the "assimilated," are thanks to their tradition.

In Weininger I first noticed what decisive significance the connection between ethos and logos has for him—then of course in Cohen, whom I have studied very little. But even in Einstein and Freud something of this ethical rationality lives on—you will perhaps indignantly deny this. In Marx and Lassalle all the more so—and even if only in their pathos of "justice," which they wish to realize rationally by means of modern enlightenment. However foreign this is to me, I nevertheless admire the straight energy and tenacity with which in everything you think and work, through a virtuoso use of polemical alternatives, you drive your fundamental thought forward with dense and rigorous consistency to the point where the problem proves insoluble and can be made soluble only by transforming the systematic question into historical analysis, whereby you (like Krüger) presuppose that

the modern—Enlightenment—presuppositions can be rendered ineffective through historical destruction—which I do not believe—unless this historical destruction were merely a theoretical method of presentation, while in reality the tradition of philosophizing under its religious "law" (= revelation) were still alive in the analyst himself; not in the vague intellectual-historical sense of a so-called living tradition, but in the particular and definite sense of still being at home in orthodox Judaism. (That would be an essential difference in your scholarly relation to Krüger.)

[SOURCE PAGE 40]

I myself stand completely outside this—and no Aryan or German can change that—so that, in Maimonides = Strauss's words, I know only the "lower" world, and because the higher is unknown to me, the lower thereby also loses its meaning. It is no accident that you stop with Plato, who was already an end of ancient developments, whereas Nietzsche, in accordance with his Presocratic tendency, already counts him with Christianity and the "history of the longest error."

Likewise, for me the dilemma "orthodox Jew or enlightened political Zionist" has never been a problem, and your solution to it—radical criticism of the "modern" presuppositions—lies historically and substantively for me in Nietzsche's "progressive" direction: i.e. thinking through to the end, to modern nihilism, from which, however, I neither jump off into Kierkegaard's paradoxical "faith" nor into Nietzsche's no less absurd doctrine of recurrence—but ... yes, but—do not be alarmed!—if I regard such "radical" reversals in principle as false and unphilosophical, and turn away from all this immoderation and excess, in order probably one day—in the good late-antique manner (Stoic–Epicurean–Skeptic–Cynic)—to arrive at genuinely practicable wisdoms of life—at the "nearest things" and not the most remote, to which historical extravagance into the future as well as into the past equally belongs. But the Germans, no less than the Jews, lack a sense for the present—for the ⋆nunc stans⋆ of "Noon and Eternity."

I read your introductory chapter with particular interest, but also everything else—only I must first read the matter more thoroughly before I dare write anything particular to you.

Today only two things: on p. 78, World-Creation and Eternity. This was very instructive to me, because from it I see how completely consistent Nietzsche's anti-Christianity is, in that he wants once again to accept the eternal recurrence of the same and rejects as decisively as possible the idea of a creation of being (out of nothing). That he was not thereby a new "lawgiver" is also clear.

But why you reject—referring to Nietzsche (p. 24, n. 1)—"living according to nature" is not clear to me. Your argument applies only to modern natural science—but eternal, ever-the-same nature itself has never oriented itself according to the historical ideals of men, and simply because there is nature and there are beings existing by nature, it will always remain a meaningful thing to want to live "according to nature"—unless Christianity and German Idealism and existential philosophy (which, incidentally, you should have discussed not in windy Gogarten but in Heidegger!) are right in thinking that man is only in the world and not also of this world.

And Nietzsche's aphorism does not criticize the Stoic wish to live according to nature, but only that nature is not as the Stoic or finally Rousseau wants it to be—namely "moral," whereas according to Nietzsche it is without "intentions and considerations," without "justice," and morally indifferent.

And against the end of the aphorism (which seems to speak for you) I would say: as teacher of eternal recurrence N. himself did not merely test his "spiritual will to power," but allowed himself to be "inspired" by the "highest distress of being" and often enough, in the image of Zarathustra, gave voice to the being of this world according to nature. And where he did so, he was not one with it, but nevertheless in agreement with the nature of the natural world and saw it again as the Greek had seen it—which was possible for him only because he himself had been in the Mediterranean and there had seen sky, sun, and sea—the finite world of eternal recurrence of the same.

So much for today! Have you received my book? In the *Jüdische Rundschau* I happened by chance upon a brilliant review of your book at Krautheimers.

* The critical appendix on the Nietzsche literature, of which the last review (by Maulnier) will interest you especially, will follow.

Have you visited Dr. W. Brock in Cambridge?

[SOURCE PAGE 42]

26

Cambridge, 23 June 1935

Dear Löwith!

I have just finished reading your Nietzsche book and would like on this occasion to repeat my warmest thanks for making this interesting and important work accessible to me. As an old Nietzschean—as I once was—it concerns me directly. And I am very much in your debt for having made intelligible to me the decisively important connection between nihilism and eternal recurrence. In general, I have never read a work which posed the problem of Nietzsche, and Nietzsche himself as a problem, so clearly and so deeply. I should say that your interpretation of Nietzsche is the only one I know which compels a substantive confrontation—not about N., but about truth.

If I therefore allow myself some remarks in what follows, I must preface them by saying that I am by no means a Nietzsche scholar; I can only say that Nietzsche so dominated and enchanted me between my twenty-second and thirtieth years that I believed, word for word, everything I understood of him—and, as I see precisely from your work, that was only a part of his teaching.

You have convincingly demonstrated that something "does not fit" in N.—even if your criticism of Emmerich's thesis that the will to power and eternal recurrence are identical remains open to objections. My doubt concerns the disposition of your criticism, which, I think, does not do justice to N.

I begin with your excellent formulation, which strikes the core of the question and expresses exactly what I feel: "Repetition of antiquity at the peak of modernity." From this there first emerges a dualism: a) modern approach to antiquity on the basis of an initially immanent criticism of modernity, b) the ancient teaching itself.

The approach (or modern introduction to something wholly unmodern) is guided by the critical basic concept of honesty. It appears in this connection:

man can be honest only if he remains faithful to the earth, if he affirms the world (test case: criticism of Christian morality as arising from ressentiment); the most extreme expression of world-affirmation: eternal recurrence, innocence of becoming (the latter opposing the traditional view of the innocence of being). In other words: eternal recurrence is discovered in the search for a myth that makes one strong and courageous. All this belongs to the approach to the doctrine, and therefore, precisely in the sense of N.'s intention, gives a distorted aspect of the doctrine itself, whose proper foundation is purely cosmological. Once the doctrine has been appropriated, it is taught calmly. The fact that N. insists upon it convulsively is due solely to the fact that he had to wean us and himself from the millennia-old pampering (enervation) produced by belief in creation and providence. Essential to this pampering is rebellion against the indifference of the universe, against its purposelessness, which underlies modern civilization.

[SOURCE PAGE 43]

I believe that essential difficulties of N.'s doctrine are grounded in its polemical character and disappear immediately when one distinguishes between the polemical approach and the doctrine itself. The dualism just mentioned—approach and doctrine—has nothing to do with another dualism, namely that of a) morality and b) metaphysics. For the latter is unavoidable both within the approach and within the actual doctrine. It is by no means tied to the modern antithesis of "man" and "world," as Aristotle alone sufficiently proves.

I agree with you that the doctrine of eternal recurrence taken by itself does not answer the moral problem, and that the identification of recurrence and will to power (which perhaps N. had in mind?) is no solution. But eternal recurrence, or more precisely the readiness to endure it, is the ⋆conditio sine qua non⋆ for a truly natural morality.

You rightly say: eternal recurrence is incompatible with a will toward the future—I ask, however: is will necessarily will toward the future? Yes, in the modern world; no, for the ancients. In general, please do not forget that there is no problem of the will before the Stoa at all.

In short: I think you do not take seriously enough the intentions of N. that point beyond N.'s doctrine. You do not enter sufficiently into them. For it is not enough simply to stop where N. no longer holds together; one must ask whether N. himself was unfaithful to his intention of repeating antiquity, owing to his being caught in modern presuppositions, or in polemic against them.

I hope I have made myself understood. What I mean will become clearer to you once you read my Hobbes analysis. Please write again soon; I should be very glad if we could once more arrive at a real controversy.

[SOURCE PAGE 44]

P.S. I have read your letter of 15 April once again, your remarks on my work. You deny that the transfer of the systematic question into historical analysis is possible unless "this historical destruction were merely a historical method of presentation, while in reality" the old way of thinking remained alive in the analyst. I gladly grant this; but I believe you too must admit that this condition is fulfilled in all of us, since we are all human beings and live and breathe in the same way and also perform certain "higher" functions than our—though not "animal-like"—ancestors. We are natural beings who live and think under unnatural conditions—we must reflect upon our natural being in order to abolish the unnatural conditions through thought.

We cannot be "Presocratics," because that is impossible for intelligible reasons, and you admit this yourself by wishing to philosophize "in the good late-antique manner (Stoic–Epicurean–Skeptic–Cynic)." But these late-antique philosophies—even the Skeptics—are far too dogmatic for you in particular to stop with them and not have to return to their common ancestor, Socrates, who was no dogmatist. So-called Platonism is merely a flight from Plato's problem. Incidentally: I am not an orthodox Jew!

[SOURCE PAGE 45]

27

Rome, 24 June 1935

Dear Strauss,

Yesterday I had an opportunity to speak with the central figure of the circle, Dr. R. König, about your work. Despite his principled aversion to English things, I do not consider it entirely impossible, and I gave him your Maimonides as a sample of your writing. I would advise you to send him the general plan, or table of contents, of your Hobbes, referring to me. Perhaps he will then ask for the manuscript for assessment. Explain to him—in a short typed letter—the intellectual-historical connection of your work with liberalism, so that its "current relevance" for Germany becomes clear to him.

His address, until the end of August, is presently: Taormina (Sicily), Villino delle Rose, presso Lionardo Siligato.

The London lectureship has unfortunately suffered a miss. So, more ⋆pazienza⋆! I am reading a great deal of Burckhardt. About my German impressions another time.

Warm regards from your
Karl Löwith

[SOURCE PAGE 45]

28

28 June 1935

Dear Strauss,

The Tönnies publisher H. Buske, Leipzig C 1, Talstr. 2, is soon bringing out a Tönnies Festschrift and is one of the very few publishers who still take risks and are decent. I myself was invited to contribute, but have no connections with the publisher. If you could perhaps obtain a recommendation through Tönnies, that would be decisive—in any event offer him your work; he will then make inquiries through Tönnies or his pupil Dr. Jurkat (Berlin-Charlottenburg 4, Niebuhrstr. 71).

[SOURCE PAGE 46]

I know from him that, among others, the following foreign contributors are participating in the Tönnies Festschrift: Prof. Sorley, Cambridge; Steinmetz, Amsterdam; Dr. Leemans, Belgium; Prof. Nicoforo, Rome; Kannellopoulos, Athens; Boas, New York; Sorokin, Cambridge, Massachusetts (U.S.A.).

Perhaps you could approach one of these gentlemen and thereby establish a connection yourself with Tönnies or the publisher Buske.

Warm regards,
Yours,
K. Löwith

I have just received your letter, whose line of thought is very clear and convincing and to which you will receive a detailed reply—but at present there is such terrific heat here that my head is incapable of it. Meanwhile I have also sent you the unfortunately French article from the ⋆Recherches⋆.

[SOURCE PAGE 46]

29

Rome, 13 July 1935

Dear Strauss,

1) First of all—as regards a publisher: have you tried Buske and written to Dr. König (⋆Runde⋆)? An Italian interested in Hobbes asked whether an Austrian or Czech publisher might be considered. Translated into Italian, you might find one here through Croce. Alcan (Paris), furthermore, also publishes German books, as far as I know.

2) Please send your Spinoza book as a review copy to Prof. Cantimori, Rome, Piazza Aracoeli 12 II. He wants to review it in the ⋆Giornale Critico⋆ (the best philosophical specialist journal here).

3) And this is the most difficult: your critical remarks about my Nietzsche book, for which I thank you very much. Certainly it would have been more fruitful to ask the question of "true" being and go beyond the immanent analysis, as you mean, toward a "natural morality." The final chapter, unfortunately too undeveloped, was intended to do this, guided by the motif "measure and mean," which you strangely do not address, although it is precisely here that I begin, from N. himself, the possibility and necessity of a positive criticism.

[SOURCE PAGE 47]

Since I cannot yet present to you the book which would have to follow from this chapter, the Nietzsche interpretation nevertheless remains at the demonstration of a fundamental inconsistency. But I do not understand the following in your remarks: why do you think that the dualism between N.'s polemical approach and the doctrine itself has nothing to do with that between morality and metaphysics, or anthropology and cosmology, or will to ... and fate? For in N. the problematic approach, proceeding from the doctrine of recurrence itself, makes an existential "project" ("New Enlightenment"), in contradiction to the original doctrine as a cosmological vision, whose linguistic expression in N. is then the Dionysian "parable." It may be that modernity has merely driven this fundamental contradiction between morality and world to its extreme—but it did not exist in this form in antiquity, and least of all among the Presocratics.

The identification of will to power and eternal recurrence is and remains absurd, and I do not see why my criticism of Emmerich is not just as convincing as that of Baeumler, Bertram, Klages, etc. You may reply: yes, but then the postulate of a "natural morality" follows. But what is this morality or naturalness? Certainly not the morality of a "willing" toward the future, and equally little a purely cosmic naturalness "without will and goal." But what then?

You are right when you say that eternal recurrence is incompatible with will toward the future and ask whether will necessarily means only will toward the future, i.e. modern willing and being-able-to-be and projecting. But you are wrong if you think that N., or any of us "moderns," can simply shake off his "being caught in modern presuppositions" and thus, in principle, "repeat" ancient antiquity after all. The utmost that the modern can "do" is indeed what N. attempted—in his Zarathustra chapter on liberation from willing, or from the "It was."

[SOURCE PAGE 48]

But since I want nothing utopian, radical, or extreme, and on the other hand do not want to content myself with any "mediocrity," I am left, as a positive-critical standard, only with the fundamental destruction of all these extremities, in returning to the originally also ancient ideal of measure and

mean. From there follows a reasonable and "natural" reconciliation of morality and metaphysics, of will and fate, of man and world generally.

Seen in this way, N. did not become unfaithful to his "intention" (to recover antiquity) because of his polemical entanglement in modern nihilism, but rather: he was, broadly speaking, a disastrous, theologically burdened, classical over-philologist, who never understood why the wiser and more moderate Burckhardt answered him so strangely reservedly in his letters, although N., in the outbreak of madness, recognized and confessed that it was not N. but B. who was the great "teacher," because he—in times of decline—knew and repeated once again what ancient moderation had once been.

If, however, the appropriation of the doctrine of eternal recurrence takes place by N.'s extreme routes, then it cannot subsequently be "taught calmly" either, but remains an artificially forced "project." And if—as you say—the readiness to endure eternal recurrence really were the *conditio sine qua non* for a truly natural morality, then I believe there would never be a natural morality. There are better and more moderate ways of weaning oneself from belief in progress and belief in creation and providence. For example, when Burckhardt repeatedly emphasizes that man—morally and intellectually—has always been "complete." Corresponding to this, cosmologically, is N.'s entirely true sentence: "The world is perfect," and I regret only that in my book I did not explain the relevant passage (p. 162) more fully, so that it would become clear why it is "perfect" both in being and in time—because it has always been what it will always still be—which becomes visible to us, however, only in those brief moments of the greatest happiness which one experiences rather in the South than in the North—even when one "exists" in complete uncertainty, without a Rockefeller scholarship and without other prospects and with diminishing savings.

Please send my letter back to me, with a deciphering of the handwritten portion, which this time, despite my best efforts, I could decipher only 10%!
Warm regards,
Yours,
Karl Löwith

[SOURCE PAGE 49]

30

Cambridge, 17 July 1935

Dear Löwith,

As you requested, I decipher the handwritten lines at the end of my last letter:

"I have read your letter of 15 April once again, your remarks on my work. You deny that the transfer of the systematic question into historical analysis is possible unless this historical destruction were merely a historical method of presentation, while in reality the old way of thinking remained alive in the analyst. I gladly grant this, but I believe you must also admit that this condition is fulfilled in all of us, since we are all human beings and live and breathe in the same way and also perform certain 'higher' functions than our—though not 'animal-like'—ancestors. We are natural beings who live and think under unnatural conditions—we must reflect upon our natural being in order to abolish the unnatural conditions through thought (their real abolition will already be accomplished by the self-destruction of civilized humanity in the next world war, and more effectively and thoroughly than by the proletarian revolution). We cannot be 'Presocratics,' because that is impossible for intelligible reasons, and you admit this yourself by wishing to philosophize 'in the good late-antique manner (Stoic–Epicurean–Skeptic–Cynic).' But these late-antique philosophers—even the Skeptics—are far too dogmatic for you in particular to stop with them and not have to return to their common ancestor, Socrates, who was no dogmatist. The Platonism of the later period is merely a flight from the Socrates–Plato problem. Incidentally: I am not an orthodox Jew!"

I have to thank you for your two cards, your letter, and your French essay. It is very kind of you to make efforts about a publisher for my Hobbes book. But I cannot bring myself to write the letters. I already have a whole stack of rejections, and these disappointments have so worn me down that I do not want to expose myself to any more of them, and I would rather use my small strength for work than for irritation.

[SOURCE PAGE 50]

I shall therefore leave the work in manuscript—I lose nothing and neither does the world, although it is undoubtedly better than anything I have written so far.

You see, I am somewhat depressed. I do not quite know why myself. I say this by way of apology for not replying adequately to your Nietzsche letter and your Hegel essay.

About the essay only this much: you are doing great service by repeatedly pointing to Hegel's decisive significance as the unsurmounted end of modern philosophy. Nevertheless, I believe that the necessity of Hegel can be understood radically only from the foundation of modern philosophy in the seventeenth century. For Hegel is only the end of modern and, perhaps, of Christian philosophy—but not of the philosophical tradition as such. Connected with this difference is the fact that I do not think as unfavorably as you do of nineteenth-century academic philosophy: phenomenology emerged from it!

You know N. so much better than I do that I scarcely dare contradict you. I can only say: when one considers what decisive significance the dogma of creation and providence has for the whole of post-ancient philosophy, one understands that liberation from this dogma could be achieved only through the "superhuman" effort of the doctrine of eternal recurrence. Once this liberation—the liberation from an incredible pampering of the human race—has been achieved, eternal recurrence can be taught calmly, provided that it is true, and that is the central question for cosmology. In any case, only on the presupposition that it is taken seriously as a possibility and endured is genuine philosophizing possible. The primary theme of this genuine philosophy, however, is not cosmology, and therefore the proclaimed doctrine is not initially the point.

As for your criticism of Emmerich, I object only that E. may correctly reproduce N.'s opinion; I grant that this opinion is itself untenable. Regarding liberation from the "It was" in Descartes (!) cf. my ⋆Spinoza⋆ book, pp. 168ff.

You deny that N. became unfaithful to his intention of repeating antiquity because of his entanglement in polemic against Christianity and modernity;

but you yourself say that theological burden was responsible—which on closer inspection amounts to the same thing.

[SOURCE PAGE 51]

Why did I not address "measure and mean"? Because I know what you mean by it, namely, for example, Burckhardt. I readily believe you that B. was the ideal representative of ancient moderation in the nineteenth century—but the themes of his philosophizing are possible only on the basis of modern "immoderation": no ancient philosopher was a historian. And that rests not upon the lack of a sixth sense, but precisely upon the sense for what is appropriate for man to know, what his "mean and measure" are. No, dear Löwith, Burckhardt—this really will not do.

Now enough of the outpouring. Read Swift—he was, beside Lessing, the freest spirit of modern times.
Warmly yours, always devoted to you,
L. Strauss

[SOURCE PAGE 51]

31

31 December 1935 — Postcard

Dear Strauss,

A warm greeting just before the end of the old year—in the hope of hearing from you again. What are your plans, or what are your further fortunes? Is Hobbes progressing, and will you be able to establish yourself in England?

I negotiated for two months with Bogotá in Colombia and was prepared, for lack of other prospects, to go to the Equator—but nothing came of it; in the end they appointed only half of those proposed. Recently I was invited to Istanbul to give a lecture and got to know the conditions there. Whether the Turks will create a position in 1936 and whether I shall have the good fortune to obtain it, Heaven knows.

Until June I am once again covered by Rockefeller and Mendelssohn; the former is unknown in Marburg and Berlin and must remain so there. External living conditions have become so difficult and exhausting that my

work on Burckhardt is progressing very slowly. Several months were spent learning Spanish for Bogotá. But I do not want to complain, for after seeing Istanbul, Rome is still a European asylum for people like us.

[SOURCE PAGE 52]

Erik Peterson has published a work with Hegner which will also interest you greatly: ⋆Monotheism as a Political Problem⋆, i.e. a historical destruction of every political theology, or of the connection between the Roman Empire and Christian theology. Very learned and well written. Otherwise I know nothing new of importance. Perhaps you do?

Mille auguri for 36
from your
Karl Löwith

P.S. On the journey to Istanbul I spent a day in Athens and looked over the country from the Acropolis.

[SOURCE PAGE 52]

32

10 January 1946

Dear Löwith!

Under the seal of strictest confidentiality I inform you that both the Philosophy Department and the special committee have proposed you for Spring 1948. The decision by the faculty will probably fall next week (15 January). I am very pleased.

As for your request that I read through your work, unfortunately I cannot fulfill it. I am so occupied with my lectures that I shall be glad if I manage to finish by June a shorter essay that I have to write.

As you can see from my writing, I am not at all well. One grows older and older, and nothing gets finished. Life here in this country is terribly difficult for people like me. One must fight for the simplest working conditions, and one loses in every fight. I would have liked to have my study of Socratic politics, which you mention, printed. But it is impossible to print it here. If I

had time, I would retrovert it and try to place it in Switzerland. What does not fit the scheme here is lost.

I no longer remember who told me about Boschwitz's sister. I think, however, that the source was reliable. I know nothing about F. Boschwitz.
Warmly yours,
Leo Strauss

[SOURCE PAGE 53]

33

Hartford, Connecticut, 14 August 1946

Dear Strauss,

Your criticism of Wild is in a wonderfully disproportionate relation to its object and a true masterpiece, unfortunately far too good and intelligent for W. to understand, and if you do not induce S. R. to send a copy to him, or at least to his publisher, he may never see it—what a pity that you did not publish it in the ⋆Journal of Philosophy⋆ or ⋆History of Ideas⋆.

The only sentence I would omit is p. 1: "It is safe to predict that the movement which his book launches ..." That is very unsafe, for how should Mr. Wild ever launch a movement, and how can you yourself believe that in the U.S.A. a return to antiquity could become a serious endeavor or fashion? In this Christian America it could at most lead to a re-examination of Christian presuppositions, and even with regard to the ⋆querelle des anciens et des modernes⋆ I doubt whether you are 100% right if you take this discussion literally and relate it exclusively to the "ancients." At least in the course of the formation of the idea of progress, with Turgot, Condorcet, and Comte, the question is no longer whether we have advanced beyond the Greeks and Romans, but whether we can positively replace Christianity.

More important and more difficult for me to understand is your own position concerning your main problem: philosophy and historical truth. I have apparently already become so primitive and simplified in my seminar that I simply do not understand your last sentence of chapter I. Where is it misleading? And is your distinction between historical epochs in note 3 according to proximity to truth and form not itself still a historical reflection,

so that your tendency toward a principled de-historicization of the question of truth is nevertheless a modern approach and you, no more than Heidegger, can reach your goal without historical "destruction"?

I cannot imagine how you, especially as a political philosopher, could really believe that, for example, Plato's discussions of the good and the just could be simply true without historical reference to a polis that no longer exists. The fact that Mr. Wild, like a thousand others, modernizes Plato in an ignorant and tasteless fashion and in reality is not interested in Plato's teaching but in the obsolete political talk of the present about "democracy" and the "totalitarian" state does not alter the fact that every self-distinction of the "moderns" from the ancient Greeks, or even from the ancient Christians, is itself a modern distinction whose "truth" initially consists above all in the fact so beautifully formulated by Nietzsche that "modern" is what "knows neither out of nor into."

Please enlighten me, and let me know when you will speak about Athens and Jerusalem!
Warm regards,
Your Karl Löwith

I know too little about the founders of modern political philosophy, but Descartes surely cannot be understood without his criticism of Christian-medieval philosophy.

[SOURCE PAGE 54]

34

New York, 15 August 1946

Dear Löwith!

Many thanks for your remarks on my Wild review. Your kindness did me much good, since once again I have suffered shipwreck, i.e. I find myself compelled to begin once more from the beginning. The less serious side is a radical dissatisfaction with myself—you see, I am not entirely unfaithful to philosophy in regarding such things as less serious—and your friendly lines arrived at the right time.

You object to the sentence: "It is safe to predict that the movement which W.'s book may be said to launch in this country, will become increasingly influential and weighty as the years go by." But suppose I knew of two or three people who were working toward the restoration of Classical philosophy, whose works would emerge over the next ten years and who understood the matter. Then the thesis first publicly represented in America by Wild by chance would indeed gain greater influence and weight than it presently has.

[SOURCE PAGE 55]

I do not predict a fashion. In short, you underestimate my irony.

As for the ★querelle des anciens et des modernes★: I do not deny, but assert, that modern philosophy has something essential in common with Christian-medieval philosophy; but this means that the attack of the moderns is decisively directed against ancient philosophy. Incidentally, scholasticism was already considered finished by the consciousness of the participants in the sixteenth century, since they returned from medieval philosophy to its sources, Plato–Aristotle and the Bible; what is new in the seventeenth century is the rejection of everything earlier (there is scarcely anything of this in the sixteenth century—Bodin is an exception; Machiavelli did indeed conceal his radical criticism under the guise of a return to Rome or Livy).

Furthermore, the greatest representatives of the ancient side in the quarrel, i.e. Swift and Lessing, knew that the real subject of the dispute was antiquity and Christianity. (Do not come to me with the wholly exoteric ★Education of the Human Race★ or with Dilthey's platitudes; read the writing against Klotz—★Antiquarian Letters★—★How the Ancients Represented Death★, ★Laocoon★ (the suffering of Philoctetes against the suffering of Jesus), ★Hamburg Dramaturgy★ ...). These men had no doubt that antiquity, i.e. genuine philosophy, is an eternal possibility.

Condorcet and even Comte do not want to replace Christianity: they want to replace nonsense with a rational order. But Descartes and Hobbes already wanted that. Only once the quarrel had essentially been decided did people bring religion and Christianity into it, and this subsequent interpretation of

the modern movement determined the credulous and unbearably sentimental nineteenth century.

You object to my sentence that "insistence on the fundamental difference between philosophy and history—a difference by which philosophy stands or falls—may very well, in the present situation, be misleading." You say you do not understand this sentence. So suppose for a moment that, because of an accidental impediment (i.e. modern barbarization), we first have to learn the elements of philosophy again; this possibility of pure learning does not exist in our world in so-called philosophy, whereas what the modern historian actually wants can succeed only if he behaves wholly receptively, seeking to understand.

[SOURCE PAGE 56]

You cannot deny that today, especially in Anglo-Saxony, one finds a few more philosophical minds in the historical departments than in "pure philosophy." This distress may be a virtue, or at least lead to virtue: if that "pure philosophy" is either empty or fundamentally wrong.

We agree that today we need historical reflection—but I maintain that this is neither progress nor a fate to be resignedly accepted, but an unavoidable means of overcoming modernity. One cannot overcome modernity with modern means, but only insofar as we too are still natural beings with natural understanding; yet the means of thought of natural understanding have been lost to us, and simple people like me and my kind cannot recover them from our own resources: we try to learn from the ancients.

What is this talk of "existential" study of history if it does not lead one to approach the teaching of earlier men not in a knowing-better, contemplative way, but in a learning, questioning, practical way? Heidegger has nothing to do with the view I have sketched, since Heidegger merely gives a sophisticated interpretation of modern historicism, anchoring it "ontologically." In Heidegger, "historicity" has made nature disappear entirely, which at least has the advantage of consistency and forces one to think.

It is a pity that you do not follow to the end the path you took in your confrontation of Hegel and Goethe. One would, of course, have to understand Goethe's natural science with the help of Lessing's "dialectic."

I really believe, although this seems fantastic to you, that the perfect political order as sketched by Plato and Aristotle is the perfect political order. Or do you believe in the world-state? If it is true that genuine unity is possible only through knowledge of truth or through seeking truth, then there is genuine unity of all human beings only on the basis of the popularized, definitive teaching of philosophy (and of course that does not exist), or if all human beings were philosophers (not Ph.D.s, etc.) (which likewise does not exist). Therefore there can only be closed societies, i.e. states.

[SOURCE PAGE 57]

But if this is so, then one can show from political considerations that the small city-state is in principle superior to the great state or territorial-feudal state. I know that this cannot be restored today;* but that today's solution, i.e. the thoroughly modern solution, is *contra naturam*, is shown by the famous atomic bombs, to say nothing of million-cities, gadgets, funeral homes, "ideologies." Whoever admits that Horace was not talking nonsense when he said, *Naturam furca expelles, tamen usque redibit*, thereby admits the fundamental rightness of Platonic-Aristotelian politics.

One may dispute details, although I myself could actually agree with everything Plato and Aristotle demand (which I tell only you). There is only one objection to Plato–Aristotle: the *factum brutum* of revelation, or of the "personal" God. I say *factum brutum* because there is no argument whatsoever, theoretical, practical, existential ..., not even the argument of paradox (a paradox as such can again be demanded by reason, as Kierkegaard shows only too well), leading from the *gnosis theou* characteristic of the genuine philosopher to faith.**

This brings me to "Jerusalem and Athens." I do not know when my lecture will be—in November, but Hula is to determine the day. Your presence would be very welcome to me.

If I may return once more to my essay, I actually wrote it for students. I wanted to show them, by an exemplary case, what rubbish by idiots is praised

in the *New York Times*, *Tribune*, etc., in order to make them a little more cautious. The only thing I did not write merely for students is the interpretation of the passage in the Seventh Letter that is decisive in a certain sense.

Please let me hear from you soon. If Frank comes to you, show him my essay freely. But no one else.

Warmly yours,
Leo Strauss

I shall not send the essay to Wild; but it will automatically be sent to Harvard Press. To whom should I send it, directly or through you? Please answer!

* But we live today in the extremely unfavorable situation; the situation between Alexander the Great and the Italian *poleis* of the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries was considerably more favorable.

** Husserl once said to me, when I asked him about theology: "If there is a God, we shall describe Him." That was genuinely philosophical. The difficulty is that those who believe they know something about God deny that He is a describable fact.

[SOURCE PAGE 58]

35

Weston, Vermont, 18 August 1946

Dear Strauss,

Many thanks for your detailed letter. To begin with what is most immediately relevant to me: there can be no doubt that Comte, etc., did not simply want to replace "nonsense" with rational order, but that his progress consists in a conscious transformation of the "Catholic system," i.e. Christianity, in socio-political terms. Why do you think that religion and Christianity were only brought in afterward (in the nineteenth century)?

And whatever one may say against progressive constructions of history, I agree with them to this extent: I too find that Christianity fundamentally modified ancient "naturalness." In a cat or a dog, "nature" always comes out again, but history is too deeply rooted in man for Rousseau or Nietzsche or

your future heroes of natural being and understanding to succeed in restoring something that had already exhausted itself in late antiquity.

The simplest test would be—as Nietzsche correctly saw—the restoration of the ancient relation to sexuality as something natural and at the same time divine. Even Goethe's "nature" is no longer the ancient one. And still less can I imagine a natural social order. The world-state is certainly nonsense and ⋆contra naturam⋆, but the ⋆polis⋆ is also ⋆contra naturam⋆, as are all historical institutions created by human beings.

Only when you can convince me that, for you, "simple man"! stars, sky, sea and earth, procreation, birth and death give the natural answers to your unnatural questions will I be able to agree with your thesis. And as for suffering, Prometheus may indeed appeal more to so-called natural understanding than Christ, but the Prometheus myth is certainly not simple and natural either.

[SOURCE PAGE 59]

How far our denaturalization goes back to Christianity is difficult to say, but certainly it is not only historical consciousness that has changed but our historical being. That it is not necessary to make nature disappear, as Heidegger does, can be seen from Schelling, who had a philosophy of spirit that opened a new access to the understanding of nature as well. He understood something of revealed religion and mythology.

You say one cannot overcome modernity with modern means. That sounds convincing to me but seems only conditionally correct, for even patient, pure "learning" will never rid itself of its own presuppositions. After all, the discomfort of modernity with itself is present only on the basis of historical consciousness, the knowledge of other and "better" times; and where this consciousness disappears—as in the generation born after 1910 in Russia and the generation born after 1930 in Germany—modernity is no longer felt as something to be overcome; on the contrary.

The atomic bomb teaches me nothing that I did not already know without it, and it is a great but not an absolute difference whether one calls the hopelessness in human nature sin or mortality and thereby distinguishes it from the Christian God or the pagan gods. "Mortals" sounds more natural

and sensible than "sinners," but I do not believe (you will know) that the expression "mortals" meant anything more than the natural end of life common to all living beings.

Where do you draw the boundary between natural and unnatural? To the Greeks it was—praise them for it—entirely natural to deal with women, boys, and animals, and bourgeois marriage is just as unnatural as pederasty, and Japanese geishas* are as natural for man as O. Wilde's friend was for him.

To establish a perfect order—whether socio-political or in private morality—is always bound up with unnaturalness—simply *qua* order.

You should send your Wild essay to A. Lovejoy, von Fritz (Columbia), Kuhn, P. Friedländer, Jaeger, Green, J. Randall, and the Chicago professors whom Riezler will be better able to name for you.

Incidentally, Gregorovius has a charming chapter on Athens and Jerusalem (unphilosophical). Can you determine in which issue of *Antike* a paraphrase of Aristotle's "magnanimous man" appeared? I should like to know.

Warm regards and thanks,
Yours,
Karl Löwith

* by the way: the most artificial creatures I have ever seen.

[SOURCE PAGE 60]

36

New York, 20 August 1946

Dear Löwith!

Many thanks for your interesting letter of the 18th, which has just arrived. Since I am presently occupied with the subject Jerusalem and Athens, it arrives at the right time.

It is astonishing that we (although we understand one another very well up to a certain point) understand one another so little beyond that—it is astonishing in view of the importance of what we do understand. Where do our paths divide? I mean it seriously: at the decisive point you are not simple enough,

whereas I believe myself to be. You do not take the simple meaning of philosophy literally enough: philosophy is the attempt to replace opinions about the whole by genuine knowledge of the whole.

For you philosophy is nothing other than self-understanding or self-interpretation of man, and naturally of historically determined man, if not of the individual. In Platonic terms, this means that you reduce philosophy to a description of the interior decoration of the particular cave, the cave (= historical existence), which then can no longer be seen as a cave. You remain stuck in Idealism = Historicism. And you interpret the history of philosophy so that it confirms the historical conditionedness, or rule of prejudices, which you assert. In substance you identify philosophy with "worldview"; you therefore make philosophy radically dependent upon the particular "culture."

For example, there can be no doubt that our ordinary way of feeling is conditioned by the biblical tradition; but this does not exclude our making clear to ourselves the problematic character of the presupposition on which this feeling rests (belief in creation by the loving God) and correcting our feeling through self-education.

[SOURCE PAGE 61]

I know from my own experience how unintelligible and foreign Aristotle's concept of ⋆megalopsychia [greatness of soul]⋆ [greatness of soul] originally was to me, and that I now approve of it not only theoretically but practically. A man like Churchill proves that the possibility of ⋆megalopsychia [greatness of soul]⋆ [greatness of soul] exists today just as it did in the fifth century B.C.

As to modern philosophy and progress: modern philosophy or science was originally the attempt to replace the allegedly or really inadequate Classical (and therefore at the same time medieval) philosophy or science with the correct philosophy. The "inadequacy" was this: the developed science of antiquity (Plato–Aristotle) was unable to account for certain natural phenomena of the "external" world for which, according to its own meaning, it ought to have been able to account.

The idea arose that the "materialist" physics displaced by Classical philosophy, i.e. above all Aristotelian physics, offered opportunities for knowledge of unheard-of extent. But: from Plato–Aristotle one had learned

that materialist physics cannot understand itself, the possibility of knowing (*noein [to know, to apprehend intellectually]* [to know, to apprehend intellectually]). Thus the task: first to secure the possibility of knowing, in order then to carry out mechanistic physics and thereby understand the universe.

This is the meaning of Descartes' *Meditations*, the foundational book of modern philosophy. Biblical-scholastic motives contributed, but modern science, i.e. modern philosophy, is fundamentally to be understood internally, theoretically. The same is true of practical-political philosophy, as I set out at greater length last year in my General Seminar paper on natural right.

Now, around 1750, the edifice of mechanistic physics and the politics based upon it had been built: awareness of its problematic character comes to the fore, Hume and above all Rousseau. One sees that the promise of enlightened politics (Hobbes, Encyclopédie), through the dissemination of mechanistic physics and anthropology, to establish the right order, cannot be kept; one sees this—one, i.e. Rousseau—because one learns from Plato to see the problem "science–politics" again (it had never been entirely forgotten: Spinoza, Leibniz); society needs "religion."

A generation after Rousseau one sees that religion cannot be "made," as Robespierre wanted: therefore Christianity, or something like Christianity.

[SOURCE PAGE 62]

From this reaction against the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment itself is interpreted as Christianly motivated, and this succeeds because the Enlightenment had always, for political reasons, accommodated itself to Christianity. The *fable convenue* [conventional fiction] thus created is the basis of the prevailing view today.

Return to the natural view: you confuse the Greek man in the street, and, if you like, the Greek poet, with the Greek philosopher. (That Nietzsche made the same mistake often, though not always—see *Genealogy of Morals*, "What Do Ascetic Ideals Mean?"—does not make the matter better.) Plato and Aristotle never believed that "stars, sky, sea, earth, procreation, birth and death give natural answers to their unnatural questions." Plato famously

“flees” from these “things” (*pragmata*) into the *logoi*, because the *pragmata* directly give no answer, but are mute riddles.

As for sexuality in particular, like everything natural it is an admirable mystery (only the moderns are so mad as to believe that the “creation” of a “work of art” is more admirable and mysterious than the generation of a dog: look at a mother dog with her puppies; and the power by which Shakespeare conceived, felt, and wrote *Henry IV* is not Shakespeare's work, but greater than any work of any human being)—an admirable mystery, higher in rank than anything human beings have made: “morality” means no more than this for philosophers.

For the classical philosophers at least, sexuality is less “divine” than understanding (*nous*). From this follows the philosophers' practical position toward sexuality. Take an extreme: the logicians—see Diogenes Laertius, see Antisthenes. Antisthenes was a fool, but he knew something more about what a Greek philosopher is than we so readily do.

When you say that the *polis* is *contra naturam* like all human institutions, you merely repeat a Greek-philosophical thesis, the thesis of the so-called “Sophists,” but also of philosophers such as Democritus, Archelaus, etc.—thus a thesis to be taken seriously. I believe the question whether the *polis* is *physei* or *para physin* cannot be answered without qualification. In any case, the fact that it is institutional is not yet proof that it is *contra naturam*: some institutions assist natural tendencies.

[SOURCE PAGE 63]

In any event I maintain that the *polis*, as interpreted by Plato and Aristotle, the manageable urban, morally serious (*spoudaia*), agrarian society in which the gentry rules, is morally and politically the most reasonable and agreeable thing—which does not at all mean that I would want to live in such a *polis* (one must not judge everything according to one's private wishes). Do not forget that Plato and Aristotle preferred democratic Athens as a residence to the *eunomoumenai poleis*: for philosophers, moral-political considerations are necessarily secondary.

Christ and Prometheus: “Prometheus may perhaps appeal more to so-called natural understanding than Christ, but the Prometheus myth is not simple

and natural either." Quite apart from everything else: the Prometheus story is a myth, i.e. an untrue story, whereas Christianity stands or falls with the alleged fact that Jesus rose again. The resurrection of a dead man is a miracle, *contra naturam*; that human beings tell one another untrue stories which nevertheless have a "meaning" is *secundum naturam*.

The Prometheus story presupposes jealous gods—the philosophy denies their existence, indeed their possibility—and thereby denies the possibility of the Prometheus story. Again you confuse the philosophers with the Greeks. (But most Greeks were merely Greek Babbitts or Homaises or ...)

"It is surely not only historical consciousness that has changed, but our historical being": Indeed! But if this change rested on erroneous presuppositions, then we cannot fold our hands in our laps; we must do our best to reverse it—not socially or politically, but *privatissime [in the most private manner]* [in the most private manner].

"The discomfort of modernity with itself exists only on the basis of historical consciousness": The reverse: historical consciousness is a consequence of modernity's discomfort with itself. See Savigny's profession.

That the younger generations in Germany and Russia no longer feel modernity to be something to be overcome is, of course, entirely irrelevant—as irrelevant as what the Andaman Islanders (in Riezler's essay on "Man's Science of Man" in *S.R.*) think about tin cans.

Boy-love, etc.: please read Plato's *Laws* on this subject. Do not forget the natural connection between sexual organs and procreation.

[SOURCE PAGE 64]

Monogamy is another matter, although I myself have some sympathy for it. The philosophers had a very cynical and healthy argument for monogamy.

Thank you for the names. Who is the Green to whom I should send the Wild essay, and where?

Antike VII, 1931—Jaeger's translation of Aristotle's analysis of magnanimity.

Warmly yours,
Leo Strauss

Have you incidentally read my review of Olschki's work on Machiavelli (⋆S.R.⋆, March 1946)? I should like you to read it.

[SOURCE PAGE 64]

37

Undated Postcard

Dear Strauss,

⋆Visibilium omnium maximus mundus est, invisibilium omnium maximus Deus est. Sed mundum esse conspicimus, Deum esse credimus. Quod autem Deus fecerit mundum, nulli tutius credimus quam ipsi Deo. Ubi eum audivimus? Nusquam interim nos melius quam in scripturis sanctis, ubi dixit propheta eius: In Principio fecit Deus caelum et terram⋆ [Of all visible things, the world is the greatest; of all invisible things, God is the greatest. But we see that the world exists; we believe that God exists. And that God made the world, we believe from no one more securely than from God Himself. Where have we heard Him? Nowhere meanwhile better than in the Holy Scriptures, where His prophet said: In the beginning God made heaven and earth.] (Civ. Dei XI, 4).

At this point I wish to go on with your Lessing quotation: "dass das einzige Buch, welches ... für die Wahrheit der Bibel jemals geschrieben worden, ... kein anderes als die Bibel selbst sei." But I am at a loss to make a decent translation of this passage of Lessing. Please let me have your translation!

Vale

P.S. If your lecture has been typed, I would also like occasionally to read your interpretation of Genesis 1–3.

[SOURCE PAGE 65]

38

26 November 1946

Dear Löwith!

Many thanks for the Buhmann, for the information concerning Brunner, and for your card. As for the Lessing quotation, I am glad that you ask only for

my translation (and not for the source): "The only book which ever has been written in defence of the Bible is the Bible itself." The passage is somewhere in the theological writings, presumably those connected with the publication of Reimarus's "Fragments."

Confidential—you have been proposed by Riezler as his representative for Spring 1948. The prospects are favorable. I myself would be very pleased.

As for Brunner, I shall not review him, but I intend to read him next year in connection with a course "Philosophy and Theology," in which I intend to develop the thesis of my lecture.

The day after tomorrow I am going to Annapolis to give my General Seminar lecture in expanded form. On the return journey I shall stop at Bryn Mawr to visit Frank and at the same time give an informal address on Socratic politics.

May I still keep the two Bultmanns for a while? I have not managed to read them, since my lecture on Spinoza and my seminar on Montesquieu are consuming me completely.

Do you know Montesquieu? He is the most perfect gentleman of Continental Europe (he had an English mother). Entirely anti-Christian, more humane than Machiavelli, equally attracted to republican Rome and the ancient Germans, kindly and nobly frivolous, etc., etc.—in short, everything Nietzsche imagined Stendhal to be, which Stendhal was not. (Stendhal already derives from Rousseau.)

Warmly yours,
L. S.

[SOURCE PAGE 66]

39

Weston, Vermont, 31 August 1948

Dear Strauss,

1) *Mille auguri* for Chicago! Naturally a university like Chicago is preferable to department status in New York, and I am already looking forward to seeing you there in winter! Not that I too have been appointed,

but the Divinity School needs a substitute for the theologian Pauck for the winter quarter, who is currently lecturing in Frankfurt, and has selected me as the theologian for the purpose. I have just received permission from my Dean to accept this distinguished invitation ("our faculty is honored in your honor"), so I shall be in Chicago for eleven weeks (3 January–19 March).

2) *Mille auguri* for the liberal Xenophon!

3) Top secret and most confidential: your departure from New York will probably affect not only Political Science but also the Philosophy Department. Please try, if possible together with Riezler, to have me proposed! Not so much out of any special sympathy for the New School building, but in order to get away from Divinity and once again have sensible students and a better salary than in Hartford.

I do not think Kaufmann and Kallen would be decisively opposed to me if the matter were handled properly. And I had the impression that the students I had in my lectures sincerely regretted that I was at the New School for only one semester. The great difficulty in proposing an appointment will of course be that you are irreplaceable in your combination of philosophy and Political Science.

Nevertheless I did not want to leave my wish unspoken. If anything came of it, we would of course also be delighted to take over your apartment!

Forgive these anticipations of a fish gasping for water and air on the dry sand of Protestant theology.
Warmly,
Your Karl Löwith

[SOURCE PAGE 67]

40

New York, 21 February 1950

Dear Strauss,

I have not yet thanked you for your letter. Meanwhile nothing new has happened here, but everything has developed as I already wrote to you, i.e. most unpleasantly.

It is good that your Xenophon will appear in French. It is a great pity that you are so far away—I would sometimes like to talk with you about the ⋆Holzwege⋆. So far I have read only the essay on Nietzsche, Hegel, and the modern worldview—all extraordinarily powerful in form and content and impact.

"Being" is, of course, hyper-Hegelian, "absolute," and at the same time it has now entirely absorbed the historicity of ⋆Dasein⋆ and made it metaphysical. This is an "overcoming" of historicism (in the usual sense) and at the same time the most radical historicism (in the Straussian sense). This is possible only because of the long-prepared transition from history → historicity → destiny → happening-of-being. Otherwise it becomes clear that Heidegger's endeavor is religious.

When you moved into your grand apartment we spoke briefly about my ⋆Meaning in History⋆. Your criticism of the thread of my development is related to the criticism by Kuhn enclosed here. Please return it, though—I have only this one copy. Otherwise I have heard nothing noteworthy about it, and the American theologians, Niebuhr included, agree that my distinction between sacred history and world history is too "pessimistic."

That's all. I gave Simson a General Seminar lecture on Pascal for ⋆Measure⋆. Much trouble, little free time, and vague summer plans for Germany. Would you perhaps like to rent our cottage in Weston for the summer?

Warm regards,
Your Karl Löwith

H. White is very good and capable.

Leo Strauss – Karl Löwith Correspondence

Translation Review Copy — Letters 40–65

Translation standard: precise, non-florid English of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarly register; original Latin and Greek are retained with literal English translations in brackets where applicable. Editorial notes are retained.

[SOURCE PAGE 67]

40

[New York] 21 February 1950

Dear Strauss,

I have not yet thanked you for your letter. In the meantime nothing new has happened here; rather, everything has developed as I already wrote to you, that is, most unpleasantly.

It is good that your Xenophon will appear in French. It is a great pity that you are so far away—I should sometimes like to talk with you about the Holzwege. Thus far I have read only the essay on Nietzsche, Hegel, and the modern world-view—all extraordinarily strong in form and content and force of impact. The "Being" is, to be sure, "absolute" in a manner beyond Hegel, and at the same time it has now completely absorbed the historicity of Dasein and made it metaphysical. This is an "overcoming" of historicism (in the usual sense) and at the same time the most radical historicism (in the Straussian sense). This is possible only by virtue of the transition, long since prepared, from history → historicity → destiny → the happening of Being. In other respects it becomes clear that Heidegger's effort is a religious one.

When you moved into your lordly apartment, we once spoke briefly about my Meaning in History. Your criticism of the guiding thread of my development has much in common with the enclosed criticism by Kuhn. But please return it—I have only this one copy. Otherwise I have heard nothing noteworthy about it, and the American theologians, Niebuhr included, agree that my distinction between sacred history and world history is altogether too "pessimistic."

That's all. I gave Simson a General Seminar lecture on Pascal for Measure. Much trouble, little free time, and vague summer plans for Germany. Would you perhaps like to rent our cottage in Weston for the summer?

Warmest greetings,
Yours,
Karl Löwith

H. White is very good and capable.

[SOURCE PAGE 68]

41

[Chicago] 23 February 1950

Dear Löwith!

I was very pleased to see that your book has been reviewed so favorably. That can only help you. You will have noticed that Kuhn's criticism agrees with mine on substantial points. This does not prevent me from thinking, and telling you, that I regard Kuhn as a "clever" talker who is not concerned with the matter itself, and whom I do not trust.

As regards the Holzwege, I agree with your general judgment: Heidegger is the strongest living mind today. I will not call him a philosopher—he himself no longer wishes to be a philosopher—I do not know whether a true philosopher must be a man of good will—but this I do know, that an evil will destroys philosophizing, and Heidegger is a bad fellow: the contrast between Nietzsche's noblesse and H.'s brilliant stuffiness is crushing. In the end this is quite uninteresting: in the end what matters is indeed the quality of his arguments. And there one must indeed say that Heidegger has irrevocably disposed of everything that was and is in our century. The only question in the end is whether he is right in his criticism of Plato. His dogmatic-historicist rejection of every return is irrelevant: everything depends upon whether the subordination of the question of Being to the question of the being which is pre-eminent is legitimate or, as H. claims, illegitimate. Highly characteristic is H.'s essay on Anaximander, in which the imperishability or immortality of the ἄπειρον is not mentioned by a single word: there remains the absolute darkness which Being and Time cast over beings (as distinguished from Being), by saying: Being, not beings, exists only insofar as Dasein exists. Thus are there beings without Being? This darkest point is made still darker in the later publications.

Heidegger religious? Perhaps that is psychologically correct and certainly "intellectual-historically" so—all "modern" people are religious—but what he is aiming at he shows by his sharp turning away from Kierkegaard toward Nietzsche (which pleases me very much myself).

As regards Weston, I can say nothing but: perhaps. How much would you want? We would of course have to take the rather expensive journey into account.

Warmly yours,
Leo Strauss

[SOURCE PAGE 69]

42

[Chicago] 19 July 1951

Dear Löwith!

Your letter reached me in the woods and among the lakes of Upper Michigan, where we spent three weeks. On the 22nd we return to Chicago. The pencil writing is also due to our flight into the woods, which you will surely excuse.

As regards your practical problem, I can only say this: when I left Chicago (1 July), I saw no prospect, but Bergsträsser wanted to look into the matter. I shall get in touch with him immediately upon my return and let you know at once.

I received your essay, thanks to Howard White. It is excellently written, and against the madmen who dominate the stage I agree with you a thousand times. But against the real ἐπιστήμη [knowledge/science], that is, the Socratic-Platonic? You read Plato with Montaignean or Christian eyes. Socrates is no skeptic in the vulgar sense, because he knows that he knows nothing—he knows, first of all, what knowledge is—and that is not nothing; he further knows what the problems are, that is, the important problems—therefore, what is important; in other words, he knows that philosophizing is the unum necessarium [the one thing necessary]. And this knowledge is anything but "animal faith." As regards the δαιμόνιον [divine sign], read the Theages, which Kierkegaard likewise completely misinterpreted.

Concerning p. 227, paragraph 3, and p. 231, paragraph 2 (the superiority of despair or of Christian doubt over classical doubt), I observe that here you

commit a petitio principii [begging the question]: this superiority exists only on the basis of faith—otherwise, simply not at all.

To be quite frank, your article contributes to strengthening a sympathy for Heidegger which has lately awakened in me; sympathy for the Heidegger who has remained true to himself insofar as he makes no concessions whatsoever to faith.

[SOURCE PAGE 70]

42

Continuation

But how pale and inadequate Heidegger is even beside the now completely Christianized, that is, forgotten, Nietzsche. Forgive me for saying this to you, who have written the best book on N. up to now: Nietzsche seems to me not to have been understood in the decisive respect. If fate should grant me the strength to set forth his thought. I have occupied myself again with Thucydides—and I can only exclaim, with Averroes: Moriatur anima mea morte philosophorum [May my soul die the death of philosophers]. Dixi [I have spoken].

Incidentally, in your place I would prefer Kierkegaard to Pascal. K. seems to me the greater thinker both philosophically and theologically. It is no accident that Pascal was a "scientist" and never a philosopher.

But I must stop and return to—Locke.

What has become of your intention to criticize my criticism of historicism? I should very much like to see this criticism, since I am to write on this subject again.

Warmest greetings,
Leo Strauss.

Give Hula my warmest regards. I greatly enjoyed his courteous and devastating criticism of the now old ass Kelsen. "A branchy man does not scratch another's eye out."

* Hence the certainty concerning action on the ground of seeking (this against p. 232, paragraph 1).

[SOURCE PAGE 71]

43

[Chicago] 21 December 1951

Dear Löwith!

I have read your Heidegger essay twice with the greatest interest. I find your exposition excellent and decidedly superior to Krüger's. Particularly impressive is the comparison of the different editions of Was ist Metaphysik? You have, intentionally or unintentionally, confirmed my suspicion that in Heidegger's thinking modernity comes to an end, and that therefore this thinking is important for us only because, and indeed precisely because, we ourselves cannot free ourselves from modernity unless we understand modernity.

Accordingly, the criticism of Heidegger has the task of making clear precisely the modernity of the "late" Heidegger. But it is not enough to show that the "late" Heidegger broke with Being and Time, although he simply denies this—you show sufficiently that here he tells an untruth—but that in a deeper sense he is right in his self-interpretation, i.e. that the primary motivation of Being and Time is preserved in the Holzwege. One sees this immediately when one compares the "idealism" or "subjectivism" of Being and Time with that of German Idealism: the replacement of the sovereign I by existence. And the progress from existence to Being is as necessary, i.e. as rational, as that from the German youth movement (the aura of Being and Time) to the strange maturity of today (mediated by the discovery of maturity and prudent wisdom in 1933: the end of "The Self-Assertion of the German University"—the point at which the German youth movement passes over into prudence; if there is anything comic here, it is not on my account).

It seems to me that the obscurities, indeed absurdity, of Being and Time (there are beings—not Being—if there is no Dasein; i.e. there are beings if

there is no Being) lead to the Holzwege only if, and indeed precisely if, the dogmatic historicism which was never doubted from the outset is likewise not doubted further.

I am curious about the second part of your essay.

Warmly,
Leo Strauss.

44

Larchmont, N.Y., 92 Brookside Drive [undated]

Dear Strauss,

Your exposition at the New School was excellent—you betray the audience into the truth—by speaking of "Social Science" while meaning classical philosophy. But New York is a terrible place; one can never speak with one's friends in peace.

I am packing books and attending to a thousand matters before departing on 2 March. Please let me know whether you are interested in our summer cottage in Weston—completely furnished, complete privacy, and the Hulas as neighbors, since naturally they are not going to Vienna. Price $350 for the whole season, June through September inclusive, or longer if you wish. That is very reasonable! If you are not interested, please circulate the offer in Chicago among your acquaintances and colleagues who may be looking for something of the sort.

Warm regards,
Yours,
Karl Löwith

[SOURCE PAGE 72]

45

Ascona, 25 August 1952 [Postcard]

Dear Strauss,

We are sitting here at the Eranos conference, where I presented Leo Strauss's criticism of historicism to a highly cultivated audience. It is a pity that you are now not coming to Alpbach. When will your Collingwood criticism appear? (I want to cite it.) Unfortunately I did not find Blankenhagen in Heidelberg. Shall I receive an offer from the USA within the next two years? Let me hear from you!

Yours,
Karl Löwith

My dear Strauss—well, your appearance here was certainly very remarkable, i.e. historic (according to Löwith, not historical). Did your ears ring?

Warm regards,
Your Schotern

46

Heidelberg, 25 September [1952]

Dear Strauss,

to set you much at rest I hasten to thank you for Persecution and the Art of Writing as well as for Collingwood. I returned only yesterday from Switzerland and Tyrol and found both here. I am pleased that negotiations are taking place with Kohlhammer concerning the translation of your new book, and I ask you to have Chicago Press recommend my wife as prospective translator, so that we do not completely forget our English.

It is a pity that you were not also in Alpbach. I met Bergsträsser and Hayek, etc. My two Heidegger essays have caused much excitement here, and the master is very angry about them. Sorry, I cannot change that.

All the best and warm regards,
Yours,
Karl Löwith

[SOURCE PAGE 73]

47

25 November 1953

Dear Strauss,

Yesterday Dr. Köster of the Köhler publishing house visited us, and we reached an agreement concerning the translation of your Natural Right, for which I thank you warmly. My wife is not yet finished with the book for Kohlhammer and will not be able to begin work on yours until the end of March 1954. I shall gladly participate myself, for example in the M. Weber chapter. If difficult questions of translation should arise here and there, we shall consult the author.

I have never heard anything from you about my Heidegger essays, especially the third, on Nietzsche, where the problem of interpretation is at issue. Professionally things are going well here; the faculty is very decently composed, and the whole atmosphere is a blessing after the department-store of the New School, which treated me so badly, largely through Simon's own doing. Very embarrassing and fatal, however, is the insolubility of the citizen question, since it is not enough to teach again in the USA for one or two semesters in order to preserve it. Moreover, despite many attempts and letters, no institution has offered me anything; only a young Colorado College professor, recommended to me by H. W. Schneider of Columbia, would be willing to make an exchange, which would be very advantageous for him but anything but advantageous for me. And the New School, should it restore the Philosophy Department, would at best ask me whether I wanted to return permanently.*

So these are the circumstances. I am working chiefly on my lecture and give an occasional lecture here and there, such as two Italian ones in Rome a few weeks ago, which was very pleasant because I feel more at home there than anywhere else. What is the situation with your Jerusalem and European plans? It would be pleasant if we could speak with one another again. Give my regards to your wife and to v. Blankenhagen, and let me hear from you!

Warm regards,
Yours,
Karl Löwith

* Seems to mean that he is not considering a permanent return.
[Handwritten note by Leo Strauss at the foot of the letter.]

[SOURCE PAGE 74]

48

[Heidelberg] 18 March 1954

Dear Strauss,

My wife has been ill throughout the winter and in the clinic for a long time. As a result, her translation for Kohlhammer was not completed by the agreed date, and, to her great and sincere regret, she is not in a position to translate your book and finish it within a year. I have therefore looked for a replacement and fortunately found a highly competent young man who is now doing his doctorate, has spent a year in the USA studying, possesses an English interpreter's diploma, and worked at the Nuremberg Court in this capacity. I had samples of your book translated by him. He is excellent, and you could wish for no better or more knowledgeable translator. His name is Boog. I wrote to Dr. Koester of Koehler Verlag that and why my wife must withdraw from her contract, and he has already spoken personally with Mr. Boog and, like me, is convinced of his ability. I told Köster that I myself would inform you of this change and ask you to give the Koehler publishing house, or Dr. Köster, your formal agreement directly and without delay.

May Gadamer and I count on your coming to Heidelberg in June or July and giving our students a lecture in the philosophical seminar? I very much hope so, and ask you for the subject.

The New School affair has now finally been decided negatively. The New School has again behaved toward me just as scandalously as three years ago. Jonas also has complete understanding of this.

Warm regards,
Yours,
Karl Löwith

[SOURCE PAGE 75]

49

[Heidelberg] 31 December 1955

Thank you for your Riezler manuscript. At present I am under considerable pressure, because three habilitation theses are to be reviewed and four dissertations. Thus I could read it only once and quickly. I find it excellent. The fact that you bring your own concern critically to bear in the expository portions does no harm. The substantive progression from Parmenides* to the Tractatus and to the Man mutable-immutable is very well accomplished and convincing. I do not know Riezler's early political writings. I particularly liked your maxim on p. 22, top line. That Riezler was a gentleman philosophizing as a dilettante (in the best, highest sense) did not need to be said. It is only a pity that you apparently did not have his essay on Homer from Antike at hand—I think it belongs among the very best of his writings. I myself do not possess it. I find the remarks about Heidegger apt, but on p. 16 I would prefer the name of J. G. Hamann to that of R. Wagner.

At present the Magician of the Southwest is lecturing for an hour at a time on the principle of sufficient reason—in the auditorium, plus transmission to two further lecture halls—very much calculated for effect and suspense. Read in the Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte 1954, no. 3, the audience reports on Schelling's appearance in Berlin! Very similar. In Neue Rundschau (S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt) there has now appeared the chapter on "Care," translated and reshaped by Riezler himself, together with three pages by Reinhardt on Riezler's personality and biography.

It would be good if you could induce Social Research to append these few pages in translation to your lecture. I have induced the publisher to send the issue to H. White. And do not fail to send your lecture to Riezler's brother: Prof. Walter Riezler, Ebenhausen near Munich.

A few days ago Th. Litt sent me a new work of his, The Reawakening of Historical Consciousness (Quelle and Meyer, 1955), in which he defends historicism against me and Krüger. Crystal-clear and superficial, but nevertheless instructive for the academic situation in Germany. At some point I shall reply to him. But first I must get the Nietzsche ready for the press.

I have had the three books ordered—the bookseller turned out never to have received my October order for you. They are being sent to you today.

Warm regards,
Yours,
Karl Löwith

* When Reinhardt is mentioned, you should add that he dedicated his Sophocles book to Riezler, since that is not only a sign of their friendship but a great honor for Riezler.

[SOURCE PAGE 76]

50

[Heidelberg] 11 June 1956

Dear Strauss,

How unpolitical of you, in the imitatio Ickes [= Ike's], to procure more popularity for yourself by a heart attack! I heard of this mishap from one of the many travelers here passing through from the USA, and hope that you have sufficient pazienza [patience] to recover thoroughly. Thank you for the Riezler lecture from Social Research! Has the German translation of Natural Right and History still not appeared?

Hold fast to Sans souci! I am already ready for a holiday again and looking forward to Carona.

Give my regards to your wife and get better.

Warmest,
Yours,
Karl Löwith

[SOURCE PAGE 77]

51

[Heidelberg] 28 June 1956

Dear Strauss,

Your Spinoza book of 1930 was missing from our seminar library. Now we obtained it from an antiquarian catalogue and behold: the copy of C. Schmitt, with many marginal notes! A stamp shows that it was apparently sequestered with Schmitt's library by US authorities in 1945. On the first page Schmitt has written by hand:

1. First meeting, spring 1932
2. Summer 1937
3. (1st reunion) July 1945
(The occasion: the conversation with Ed. Spranger, 30 June 1945).

How is this so-called third meeting to be understood?

Warm regards,
Yours,
K. Löwith

P.S. Your "Natural Right" has meanwhile appeared in German!

52

[Chicago] 7 April 1960

Dear Loewith:

This is only to thank you for your collected essays and your article from the Gadamer Jubilee volume. Incidentally, I did not know that Gadamer is almost as old as I am. Will you convey to him my belated congratulations on his birthday. As you may have expected I am in almost perfect agreement with the theme and the thesis which you develop in your book. I reread also the essays which I knew already. I was particularly impressed by the essay on nature and humanity of man. The only difficulty I have concerns the philosophy of language: can one accept the (modern) philosophy of language without abandoning at the same time the Greek notion of "nature"? Regarding what you say on p. 222 I believe that the difference between say "rocky" and "hard" would indicate the difficulty of the thesis which you develop at that point? Page 223, line 13-14, is acceptable to me but appears to be contradicted by what you say on p. 239, line 14-19, unless one accepts the thesis which I believe is inevitable anyway, that man is the microcosm;

this would dispose of the "subjectivistic" implication of the remark on p. 223.

I hope you are well. I plan to leave Chicago in June in order to spend about fifteen months on the West Coast (Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, California) and to begin there my work on Socrates and Aristophanes.

With best regards.

Yours,
LS

[SOURCE PAGE 78]

53

[Stanford] 13 December 1960

I wrote to the Rockefeller Foundation on behalf of Marx along the lines suggested by you. I thank you for the information regarding Heidegger's Nietzsche and above all for the second edition of your Heidegger. I read it again but was unable to compare it with the first edition which I had left in Chicago. I see that we are in fundamental agreement; perhaps even more than earlier because I myself feel now more strongly than before the attraction exercised by Heidegger. I have read a bit in his book on language and it confirms the impression I had received from the Satz vom Grund and some other things that he has completely or almost completely freed himself from those provincialisms which reminded me always of Natorp and the oath on the Meissner on the one hand, and 1933 on the other.

I am not sure, however, that you are right in what you say about the "lasting" (das Bleibende). This is the same as the eternal only if das Ewige is understood as derivative from ewe, aevum, aion, i.e. something in time and not lasting for ever and ever. It is, I believe, essential to Heidegger that there is nothing eternal in the sense of the nunc stans [standing now], or sempiternal: the finiteness of being or the world, temporally and also spatially, is, as far as I understand, still essential to Heidegger.

I also do not entirely agree with you regarding Sein needing man. I believe that Heidegger's view is supported by the difficulties to which the alternative is exposed: the self-sufficient God as the ens perfectissimum [most perfect being] which necessarily leads to the radical degradation and devaluation of man. Differently stated, if Heidegger were wrong, man would be an accident, there would be no essential harmony between thinking and being, the hopeless difficulty of Kant's thing-in-itself would arise.

As for Nietzsche, I wonder, on the basis of Reinhardt's "Nietzsche's Klage der Ariadne," for instance, whether one can identify Nietzsche with Zarathustra or even with his Zarathustra. This does not in any way detract from my view that what Heidegger says about eternal return is impossible. I am sorry that I must leave it at these scanty remarks but I am very much behind in my studies.

I have heard that Gadamer's book is out. How is it? I plan to read it as soon as I am through with my most pressing work (which includes the 1001 Nights).

Cordially yours,
LStrauss

54

[Stanford] 8 February 1961

Dear Loewith:

I thank you for your essay on the Weltbegriff. I read it with great interest and with almost complete agreement. Could you give me the exact reference to "Saint Victor" as quoted by you in note 14? My difficulty is this: it is not natural to man to conceive of what we call "world" as "world," Simple proof: there is no Old Testament term for "world." I regard this as important: the unity which we mean when we speak of "world" is not "given" as dogs and cats are given.

[Fragment; remainder of letter missing in the source.]

[Leo Strauss]

[SOURCE PAGE 79]

55

[Chicago] 15 March 1962 [carbon copy]

Dear Loewith:

I read your review of Heidegger's Nietzsche, immediately after I received it and once more a few days later. I am just reading Heidegger's book while preparing myself for a seminar on Beyond Good and Evil. I am extremely interested in the issue you raise. You are surely right in questioning Heidegger's interpretation in the light of what Nietzsche himself intended. But one may of course raise the question whether Nietzsche achieved what he intended and whether the difficulty which obstructed his return to "nature" does not justify Heidegger's own philosophic attempt and therewith also Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche.

As for the fact that Heidegger is chiefly concerned with the Nachlass, I thought that he justifies this sufficiently by quoting Nietzsche's statements on the Zarathustra, on the one hand, and post-Zarathustra, on the other (cf. also: "Zarathustra is only an old atheist.").

What makes difficult Nietzsche's return to physis is of course "history," and it is history which is the starting point and the theme of Heidegger. Heidegger is very deeply indebted to Nietzsche, and he knows this, of course, and he does not, it seems to me, conceal it. That he puts the emphasis on what distinguishes him from Nietzsche is, I think, perfectly defensible, since he is naturally concerned with avoiding the pitfalls into which Nietzsche fell. The point which Heidegger learned from Nietzsche and which he could not have learned from any other philosopher is: "There is no Without"; i.e., there cannot be "objectivity" in the last analysis. From this point of view "nature" is no longer possible except as postulated in the critical moment, and eternal return as Nietzsche understands it primarily is nature qua being through being postulated.

What you say on p. 78, center, is entirely correct.

I agree with Heidegger against you concerning the subordinate status of the issue of Christianity as distinguished from Platonism. I believe that the preface to Beyond Good and Evil is decisive in this respect.

To repeat, I think that you are right against Heidegger as regards Nietzsche's intention. But once one raises the question which I believe one must raise on the very basis of your excellent book on Nietzsche—whether Nietzsche achieved what he intended, and therefore what prevented his achieving what he intended—one is compelled to concentrate on Nietzsche's radical historicism (which he may have believed to have been aufgehoben [sublated/overcome] in his "physiology," but which is not in fact), and then there is no possibility known to me superior to Heidegger's philosophic doctrine, of which his interpretation of Nietzsche forms an integral part.

I haven't heard from you for a very long time. What are you doing now? I am preparing a study on Thucydides and a book on Aristophanes.

As ever yours,
[Leo Strauss]

[SOURCE PAGE 80]

56

Carona-Lugano, 27 March 1962

Dear Strauss,

Many thanks for your remarks on the review of Heidegger's Nietzsche. It is very regrettable that we cannot speak with one another at least once a year, since many things which concern us both could be clarified more easily and quickly in conversation than in letters. I was in Basel during the winter semester, substituting for Jaspers, just for a change. I have produced nothing new, except a longer essay for the Krüger Festschrift on "Hegel's Sublation of the Christian Religion." I shall send it to you as soon as it appears, and also a lecture on the old, current question of "progress."

I have read much in Teilhard de Chardin's books, whose popularity is indeed suspect, but which nevertheless deserve to be known. For a long time now I

have been impaired in health by circulatory disturbances and ought to give up smoking altogether, which I have not yet managed to do. One must have some stimulating vice!

I am astonished at the concession you make to Heidegger: that Nietzsche failed to carry out his intention explicitly and positively is surely no justification for H.'s complete estrangement, of theological origin, from nature. On the other hand I believe that history also has its legitimate place in nature and that it has become necessary to take natural history and evolution seriously philosophically, if one does not wish simply to pass by natural science. H.'s "history of Being" is for me a hyperphysical construction, and since his interpretation of Nietzsche is directed exclusively toward this, your defense of H. must make your position concerning it clear. Does the "history of Being" signify anything to you?

Two new books may interest you: Podach, Nietzsche's Werke des Zusammenbruchs [Nietzsche's Works of the Collapse] (from the last Turin period), although there is scarcely anything new to learn from it apart from some textual-critical revisions based on the manuscripts, and G. Schneeberger, Nachlese zu Heidegger [Additional Findings on Heidegger], a collection of all Nazi documents, published in Bern by the editor himself.

I am glad that you are carrying out the long-cherished plan concerning Thucydides and Aristophanes!

Warm regards,
Yours,
Karl Löwith

P.S. Are H. Arendt's essays on political philosophy worth reading?

[SOURCE PAGE 82]

57

[Chicago] 2 April 1962

Dear Loewith:

I was happy to hear from you but sad to hear that your health is not quite good. I am suffering from the same difficulty intermittently since 1942. I too still smoke 20 cigarettes a day, although through a filter. I do not think that I make "concessions" to H. Did you yourself not assert that there is a contradiction between eternal return and freedom or that "the repetition of antiquity at the peak of modernity" (as distinguished from unqualified return to the principles of antiquity) constitutes an insoluble difficulty? In other words you have to make a choice: Are the classical principles simply sound or is the modern criticism of those principles not partly justified? H. together with practically everyone else takes the second alternative and on this basis he is infinitely inferior* to everyone else.

I do not understand the "Seinsgeschichte" [history of Being] but many things he presents under this heading are intelligible to me and some of them are in my opinion very profound insights. Especially he has cleared up wonderfully the relation between science, art and the will to power. On the other hand I believe that what he says about the a priori in Plato and particularly on the idea of the good is simply wrong. I agree with you entirely that it is high time that we should have an extensive conversation about these matters but how could this be possible? I have not seen H. Arendt's articles on Political Philosophy.

With kindest regards and best wishes.

As ever yours,
LS

* Editor's note: "superior?—inferior is presumably a dictation error in the secretary-typed letter. Cf. Letter no. 55 of 15 March 1962, second-to-last paragraph.

[SOURCE PAGE 83]

58

Carona, Lugano, 25 September 1962 (not: Corona!)

Dear Strauss,

Your intellectual autobiography interested me greatly. Much of what you treat there so clearly and illuminatingly was new to me, since I grew up quite outside the Jewish tradition and, without Hitler, probably never would have made it clear to myself that I was a Jew (my father was, of course, the illegitimate child of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish Viennese baron). Thus, only after 1933 did I occupy myself, for example, with Cohen's essays on Spinoza and with Rosenzweig. I find your Preface so substantial that I hope your Spinoza book might also be reissued in Germany with this introduction. Köhler or Kohlhammer would surely be possible for this, and a photomechanical reprint costs little (my Habilitationsschrift has now been reissued in this way by the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft in Darmstadt, which indeed brings out many books that have gone out of print).

My chief personal interest in your preface concerns the final pages: the question of atheism. If unbelief were merely unbelief and not positively the rational assumption that the whole of what exists is the natural world and nothing beyond it, then the mere "possibility of revelation" seems to me not to have the weight which you give it, and philosophy would then not rest upon an act of will, or only one decision would be possible.

Carona has had a small private observatory for several years. Does that not tempt you to visit? At the end of October we return to Heidelberg, but I shall not lecture in the winter and shall probably fly to South Africa for a few weeks in January.

Warm regards,
Yours,
Karl Löwith

[SOURCE PAGE 84]

59

[Chicago] 3 June 1964 [carbon copy]

Dear Loewith:

I was very glad indeed to receive a note from you. I do not know what to say about my single-mindedness which you say you admire, except that it

comes very naturally to me; one can also call it a natural one-sidedness, if not narrow-mindedness. The important parts of the book are those devoted to Plato and Thucydides. I would be very much interested to know how you reacted to them.

What you said about the Weber Congress interested me very much. Marcuse may be the most "brilliant" representative of that "synthesis" of Marx and Freud which is the most powerful influence affecting present-day American social science. It goes without saying that I have very little use for it. I am looking forward to your own essay on Weber. I have never heard him or seen him, but I was of course always greatly impressed by his lecture on science as a vocation. Until I heard Heidegger in the Summer of 1922, Weber was for me the embodiment of the spirit of science insofar as that spirit is effective in the study of man and human affairs. As I said to Rosenzweig on my return from Freiburg, "Compared with Heidegger, Weber is an orphan-child as regards akribeia." There probably were not many people who were attracted to Heidegger on this ground.

I shall try to get hold of Schmitt's publications to which you kindly drew my attention. I am sorry I cannot help you regarding Levison and Nelson: I never heard their names. Perhaps you ask Kennington. Kennington might also procure for you an excellent lecture by Klein on Leibniz which should be of interest to you with a view to "God, world, and man." Habermas did send me his recent publications, and I was impressed by his penetration and sagacity. Since, however, he is not simply a Marxist, the basis of his own position remains wholly obscure to me.

As for your question whether I would pay another visit to old Europe, I have accepted an invitation from the Philosophy Department at the University of Hamburg to teach as a visitor in the Summer semester of 1965. Weizsäcker wanted me to come permanently, but the authorities felt it was impractical to call someone close to his retirement age. If my and my wife's health do not play a trick on us, we shall be in Germany next year, and I will make every effort, naturally, to spend some time with you.

As ever yours,
[Leo Strauss]

[SOURCE PAGE 85]

60

[Chicago] 19 August 1964

Dear Löwith!

Heartfelt thanks for your two essays, both of which pleased me greatly. I dictated my "reply" to the essay in Merkur in the country, from which I returned to Chicago yesterday; I enclose it. I cannot do justice to your experience of Weber—I never had it—I do not fail to recognize his greatness, but the Teutonic element in it, the wholly university-bound element, ... Let us rather speak—if all goes well, next summer—of matters regarding which we feel together.

I only glanced through your essay on Descartes and Kant—the Kamische Nachlass-Werk is completely unknown to me—you reduce the number of philosophers who believe in a "personal" God—who remains?

Warmly,
Yours,
L. Strauss.

[Enclosure] 11 July 1964

Dear Löwith,

I read your essay on Weber. It is a worthy statement in honor of Weber and a worthy expression of an experience which formed you. The following comments are naturally devoted to the points where I do not see eye to eye with you.

501 paragraph 2, lines 2–3: Political economy (ultimately sociology), the critical science par excellence, the philosophic science; why this special science and not, e.g., psychology takes the place of philosophy proper is not made clear by W. (cf. 505 paragraph 2—this paragraph seems to imply that W. and not Nietzsche was the first to question the value and meaning of science—which surely goes too far).

501 paragraph 3, end: Science being the fight against prejudices must beware of becoming itself a prejudice; but is it not a prejudice fostered by modern science that the criteria for judging economic and political processes cannot be taken from those processes? They are at least to some extent intended; to that extent they contain within themselves the standard by which they claim to be judged.

[SOURCE PAGE 86]

60

Continuation of enclosure

503 paragraph 2, center: The enchanting character of the disenchantment, i.e. on the highest level the true and the beautiful coincide (Plato). That enchantment is the work of "gruesome sobriety" and not of sublime sobriety is a fitting expression in a youthful letter.

505 paragraph 1, end: "The truth" is not a mysterious meaning but the manifest mysterylessness of the world disenchanted by the progress of science—but is the mystery of the mind bent on disenchanting, to say nothing of the mind as such and of life as such, not part of the world? The mere fact that science is susceptible of infinite progress shows the mysterious character of reality.

507 bottom: What about French materialism etc.?

509 line 3–4: W. measures the possibilities of inner-worldly practice by the religious possibilities: with what right? He rejects the latter "personally": can a philosophic man leave it at such rejection? Would he not have to reopen the whole issue of the millennial fight between reason and faith?

509 bottom–510 line 3: The insight into the character of our world today is decisive only when one assumes that modern natural science and its continuation in the study of man is fundamentally sound, i.e. superior to any alternatives, is the way to knowable truth; but does modern natural science etc. not presuppose a more fundamental and deeper awareness? Do you reject entirely your phenomenological past? Also in the sequel (510, 7 ff.); what

cannot be decided "scientifically" is therefore not yet beyond the decision of human thought.

510 paragraph 2, line 6: Here you fall back on that decisionism which you so ably attacked in your criticisms of Heidegger and Schmitt. As for your critique of my critique of W., I believe I have never evaded the question of the truth of biblical religion; I have also made clear why I do not talk about this subject at the top of my voice. I do not regard myself as bound by the present-day science of the modern man of our epoch because I know that I and you and everybody else is not merely modern man of our epoch, and that this "not merely contemporary" is more important than the merely contemporary. I recognize "the fate of the time" unless I am silly or a fantast, but I deny that that fate can legitimately determine my innermost thought.

[SOURCE PAGE 87]

60

Continuation of enclosure

The possibility of a non-positivistic science of human society and in particular of political society (i.e. of a science which does not use "constructive concepts" but the concepts inherent in political society, its institutions, "movements," etc.), i.e. of a fundamentally Platonic-Aristotelian political science, is so buried by centuries of a radically different approach that I regard it as my primary task to recover the classical approach.

What you say on page 2 of your typescript shows at most the difference between W. and Rickert; otherwise it merely confirms the decisionist character of his thought: not Rickert but Sein und Zeit brings out the innermost intention of W. by liberating that intention from its positivistic eggshells.

510 bottom–511 line 3: You do not mean, of course, that the value-free science is free for one and only one resolute and consistent evaluation but to a variety of such evaluations: which evaluation is chosen depends on decision alone. For otherwise human thought as such would legitimately settle the

issue between the ethics of the free and exposed human being vs. biblical ethics, Buddhism, etc.

513 paragraph 1: W.'s indifference to parliament or monarch as a merely technical question like that regarding any other machinery would hardly be indifference in the face of the difference between communism, Nazism and liberal democracy. This posture was possible only in those long forgotten halcyon days.

514 paragraph 2: You do not give any evidence for your assertion or implication that according to W. the polis has to be understood as a supra-individual whole; as I understand him he meant that this was the way in which the Greeks excusably but erroneously understood their society.

61

Carona, Lugano, 27 June 1966

Dear Strauss,

Many thanks for Socrates and Aristophanes! I immediately read The Clouds. What a magnificent mixture of wit and seriousness, which you bring out so clearly. You are at your best in this new book! Unfortunately I do not know a German translation for "think-tank." I searched in vain for an explanation of the Greek vase picture on the cover.

You have now actually fulfilled, in a most laudable manner, the whole program of your think-tank. From the back of the cover I saw that a Festschrift for your sixty-fifth has appeared. Since I know most of the contributors, I should like to have it. Could you induce the publisher to let me have a copy?

At present I read Cervantes' Don Quixote aloud to my wife in the evenings—a kind of counterpart to Aristophanes.

Warm regards,
Yours,
Karl Löwith

[SOURCE PAGE 88]

62

[Chicago] 9 August 1966

Dear Löwith!

Meanwhile your Nature, History and Existentialism has arrived. I thank you warmly. Although I probably knew all the pieces, I read the book straight through. I agree with you entirely in the main: the basis of "philosophy of existence" is a specific—if you will, "negative"—cosmology; only on the basis of such a cosmology can "history," "culture," "morality," "art," etc. acquire the importance which these things have acquired.

While reading your essay on Marx I noticed the formal kinship of Marx's concept of the "commodity" (the "commodity-form") with Heidegger's concept of the "enframing" (Gestell).

I have asked Basic Books to send you a copy of the collection of essays dedicated to me.

Your sentence about my "Clouds" chapter pleased me greatly: almost the only encouraging word I have heard for years. Will you not read the other chapters as well?

Warmly yours,
Leo Strauss

[SOURCE PAGE 89]

63

[Chicago] 6 January 1967

Dear Löwith!

First and above all: my warmest wishes on the occasion of your seventieth birthday (the exact date of which I do not know). May you succeed in continuing your work in health and peace.

I have read your essays concerning the criticism of Christianity twice with interest. Although we do not entirely agree concerning Weber, I agree with

you on the whole. Only I believe that, in order to overcome historicism, it is necessary first of all to see how, before the "discovery" of history, what we call history was understood. In other words: one cannot understand φύσις [nature] unless one understands νόμος [law/convention] at the same time. This, and scarcely more, was what I wanted to make clear in my chapter on Thucydides and in my book on Aristophanes.

As for the English translation of your Mittelbarkeit essay, I have tried to persuade the only man I know who would be capable of translating the essay—Werner Dannhauser, Commentary, New York—to do so. But he has not yet answered me.

Once again: the best for many more years.

Yours always,
Leo Strauss.

[SOURCE PAGE 90]

64

[Annapolis] 12 March 1970

Dear Löwith!

I wish to thank you warmly for your sending. Since my retirement from Chicago I have heard nothing from you, as from others; all the more so after a stroke in November 1968. Thus my pleasure at your sending is all the greater.

I read your statement concerning Heidegger immediately twice and believe that I can now express my criticism of your position more clearly than I could in our last exchange. To the question whether man is a natural being, you answer yes and no (40; see also 46, paragraph 1: Physis* conscious existence); if this is so, nature cannot be the ground of all beings, and Heidegger, who finds this ground in Being, is therefore to be preferred.

Furthermore: human nature, as you understand it, gives no indication concerning τὸ πῶς βιωτέον [how one ought to live], precisely because you do not understand man simply as a natural being (sui generis or suae speciei

[of his own kind or species]); your premise itself excludes the question of τὸ πῶς βιωτέον. You cannot oppose anything to H.'s answer to the question concerning "the ultimate instance of our being-in-the-world." I would oppose to this answer: κατὰ φύσιν ζῆν [to live according to nature]; but you cannot do this because of your historicism.

Yet you imply the ancient answer when you say that man is concerned with the whole of the world; that is by no means his primary concern; primarily he is concerned rather with his life, with his right life; this primary question can lead to the answer that εὐδαιμονία [happiness/flourishing] consists in θεωρία [contemplation], and the man guided by this is indeed concerned with the whole of the world; here the "leaping over" of κατὰ φύσιν ζῆν [living according to nature], which you ought really to assert, takes its revenge.

Moreover: on the historicist basis, and not only on it, H. is more consistent than you, insofar as he regards "nature" as a specific interpretation of states of affairs, which are more adequately designated by something like his "fourfold" (Geviert). In any case, "nature" does not explain itself, as E. Straus silently assumes in his criticism of H. Do the Japanese, for example, have a word for "nature"? The biblical Jews have none; the Hebrew word for "nature" is a translation of χαρακτήρ [character/imprint]. (See also the last Valery quotation on p. 143.)

Incidentally, if the subhuman-living has a higher rank than man, as you seem to assume on p. 47, how can you avoid Klagesian consequences?

Last week Henrich gave a lecture here. His rationality appealed greatly to me.

I am trying—hoping against hope—to bring my interpretation of Xenophon to completion.

Let me hear from you soon.

Wishing you all the best,
always yours,
Leo Strauss.

[SOURCE PAGE 91]

65

786A Fair View Ave., Annapolis, Maryland 21403 — 30 September 1971

Dear Löwith,

I have not yet thanked you for sending your Valéry essay, which I hereby make good (there were all sorts of impediments). Since I myself scarcely have any access to Valéry, I was interested above all in how he fits into your thought. He seems to be the thinker of the preceding generation to whom you feel most closely related. It would have helped me if it had become clear to me where you part company with him.

Some time ago it occurred to me that, to my knowledge, there is not a single passage in Heidegger's writings where the name Jesus occurs, not even "Christ" (unless in an interpretation of Hölderlin which I do not know). That would surely be very remarkable. Let me hear your opinion about this sometime.

As for myself, I am trying to work out, before the end of the road, my reflections concerning Socrates and Plato. Should I publish anything, I shall of course send it to you.

Warmly yours,
votre vieux
Strauss.